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INTERESTING

VIEWS

OF

CHRISTIANITY:

BEING A

TRANSLATION

OF PART OF A WORK OF THE CELEBRATED

M. BONNET,

ENTITLED

RECHERCHES PHILOSOPHIQUES

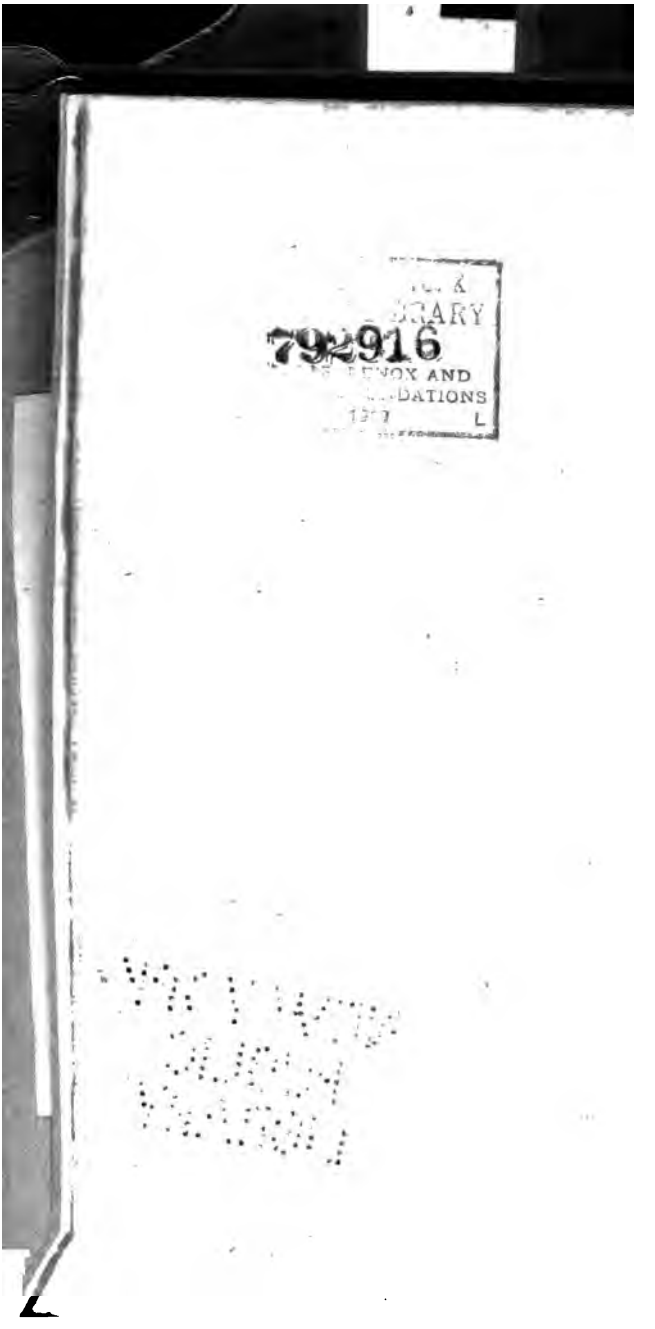
SUR LES

PREUVES DU CHRISTIANISME.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY P. BYRNE, (108) GRAFTON-STREET.

M, DCC, LXXXIX.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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE firſt part of the original work, containing ſuch diſquiſitions, as, it was apprehended, would not be generally acceptable, is on that account omitted. It is hoped, that the ſubſequent part of the work will pleaſe every claſs of readers.

INTRODUCTION.

THE author in the ſecond part of the work, proceeds to conſider the foundations and nature of teſtimony, and whether any human teſtimony, however perfect and certain, is ſufficient to eſtabliſh the certainty or probability of facts, which are in oppoſition to the ordinary courſe of nature. The merit of witneſſes is to be eſtimated by two general and eſſential conditions, their capacity and integrity. If the witneſſes are men of plain, common ſenſe, they will be ſufficiently capable of judging of palpable facts, and can eaſily aſcertain that there is no miſ-

take.

take. But becauſe the moſt palpable facts may be altered or diſguiſed by impoſture or intereſt, teſtimony ſuppoſes acknowledged probity and diſintereſtedneſs in the witneſſes. Since the probability of any fact increaſes according to the number of the deponents, teſtimony requires that this number be ſufficiently great. And becauſe a fact is always better known, the more circumſtantial it is, and becauſe a ſecret combination amongſt the deponents is never leſs preſumable, than when the depoſitions comprehend the eſſential circumſtances of the fact, without reſembling each other in manner and in form, teſtimony demands circumſtantial depoſitions, which concur together, and yet are varied in form and expreſſions. If

it

it ſhould happen, that certain facts, atteſted by different eye-witneſſes, run counter to their moſt ancient, moſt deeply-rooted, and moſt beloved prejudices, the fidelity of their depoſitions will increaſe in proportion to the certainty that they were deeply tinctured with thoſe prejudices. If it ſhould be found at the ſame time, that the witneſſes united to the moſt eſſential conditions of teſtimony, ſome tranſcendent qualities not to be diſcovered in ordinary witneſſes; if to ſound ſenſe and irreproachable manners they joined eminent virtues, the moſt univerſal, conſtant, and active benevolence; if this had never been denied by their very enemies; if they perſevered in their teſtimony with heroic conſtancy, and even ſealed it with their blood,

blood, it would appear, that ſuch a teſtimony muſt have all the force of which human teſtimony can be ſuſceptible. If, therefore, the witneſſes whom the Meſſenger has choſen, unite in their own perſons ſo many ordinary and extraordinary conditions, I ſhould think, ſays the author, that I could not reject their depoſitions without acting in direct violence to my reaſon.

But, continues he, it is undoubtedly the firſt condition of teſtimony, that the facts atteſted be not phyſically impoſſible, or contrary to the laws of nature. Now the moſt conſtant experience declares againſt the phyſical poſſibility of the reſurrection of the dead. Nevertheleſs, witneſſes, ſuppoſed highly worthy

of

of credit, atteſt, that a dead man has riſen again. It appears leſs probable, ſays M. Bonnet, that a witneſs eminently virtuous would atteſt a falſhood, than that a body ſhould undergo a modification contrary to the common courſe of nature; becauſe, ſays he, I clearly diſcover a cauſe and end for this modification; but far from diſcovering any ſufficient reaſon why ſuch a witneſs ſhould deceive me, I diſcover, on the contrary, many very powerful motives to induce him to conceal the fact, if the love of the truth had not predominated in his breaſt.—And if ſeveral witneſſes of this deſcription concur in atteſting the ſame miraculous fact; if they conſtantly perſiſt in their depoſitions; if by ſo

doing they evidently expoſe the
ſelves to the greateſt calamities, a
to death itſelf, the impoſture of ſu
witneſſes would be a violation of t
laws of the moral world, whi
could not be ſuppoſed, withc
contradicting all the notions
common ſenſe. Experience inde
proves, that according to the co
mon courſe of nature, the dead
not riſe again; but it can nev
prove, that it is phyſically impoſſi
for the dead to riſe again. Fro
the uniformity of the courſe of n
ture, it can never be logically arg
ed againſt the teſtimony, that th
uniformity is not *conſtant:* for t
experience which atteſts the unifo
mity of the courſe of nature, do
not in the leaſt degree prove, th

th

this courſe cannot be changed or modified *.

It would alſo be a contradiction to all the notions of common ſenſe to imagine, that ſuch witneſſes could be *deceived*. For it is ſuppoſed, that they atteſted very palpable facts, of which the ſenſes could judge as well as of any other facts, and which the witneſſes were very much intereſted to have aſcertained. The ſenſes ſurely were ſufficient to aſcertain that a paralytic walks, that a blind man ſees, that a dead man riſes again. The ſuppoſition, that ſuch witneſſes could not be deceivers, is principally founded on their inte-

* Vid. Dr. Campbell's Eſſay on Miracles, and particularly the Notes of the French Tranſlator.

grity. And the probability of this ſuppoſition would be very much augmented, if the facts in queſtion were of ſuch a nature, that they could not be believed by men of good ſenſe, if they had not been true. A falſe doctrine, no doubt, may eaſily gain credit: for it is the province of the underſtanding to judge of doctrine, and it may not be always provided with the knowledge neceſſary for diſcovering *falſhood* in certain caſes. But as to things which affect all the ſenſes, things of public notoriety, things which happen in times and places full of gainſayers, things which combat national, political, and religious prejudices, how could impoſtors, who had not entirely loſt their ſenſes, flatter themſelves for a ſingle moment that they could

could procure credit to ſuch things? Surely they would not think of perſuading their own countrymen and contemporaries, that a man, known by all the world, and who died in public, was riſen again: that at the death of this man, there was darkneſs over the whole country for ſeveral hours; that the earth ſhook, &c. If theſe impoſtors are illiterate men, and of the loweſt rank, it would be ſtill farther from their thoughts to pretend to ſpeak foreign languages, and they would not dare to throw upon a numerous ſociety the abſurd reproach, that it abuſes an extraordinary gift, which it had never received. It is not at all probable, that ſuch facts could ever have been admitted, had they been falſe. This would appear ſtill more

the air of a miracle, and muſt engage them to be very ſcrupulous of admitting the proofs, which are adduced in matters of this kind.

But will the viſions of alchymy determine a philoſopher to reject the truths of chemiſtry? Becauſe many books in phyſics and hiſtory contain fallacious obſervations, controvertible and raſhly hazarded facts, will a rational ſceptic draw a general concluſion againſt all books of phyſics and hiſtory? Will he extend this concluſion to all the obſervations, to all the facts indiſcriminately?

If many religious opinions have borrowed the aid of miracles, this very circumſtance would ſeem to prove, that at all times miracles have

have been conſidered as the moſt expreſſive language which the Divinity could addreſs to men, and as the moſt characteriſtic ſeal which he could affix to the miſſion of his meſſengers.

Upon comparing the miracles, atteſted by the witneſſes, whoſe depoſitions are afterwards to be more particularly examined, with the facts produced in favour of certain religious opinions, the moſt enormous difference is apparent. The former ſeem ſo ſuperior in kind, in number, in diverſity, in unity, in duration, in notoriety, in their direct and particular utility, and eſpecially in the importance of their general deſign, in the magnitude of their conſequences, and the force of their teſtimo-

nies, that it muſt be admitted they are at leaſt very probable; while the others muſt be rejected, as mere inventions, equally ridiculous in themſelves, and unworthy of the wiſdom and majeſty of the Lord of the world.

If in the moſt enlightened age of the world, and in the capital of a great kingdom, miracles were pretended to be wrought by convulſions; if a man high in office has publiſhed thoſe pretended miracles; if he has endeavoured to ſupport them by different teſtimonies; if a numerous ſociety has adduced thoſe facts, as proofs of the truth of its opinion reſpecting a paſſage in a treatiſe of theology; in all this nothing can be ſeen but a burleſque

inven-

invention, demonſtrating the moſt amazing deviations of human reaſon.

Becauſe error has had its martyrs as well as the truth, martyrs cannot be conſidered as undoubted proofs of the truth of an opinion: but if men of virtue and good ſenſe ſuffer martyrdom in ſupport of an opinion, it may be lawfully concluded, that they were perſuaded, at leaſt, of the truth of that opinion. If upon enquiring, therefore, into the foundations of that opinion, it be found, that thoſe were facts, which were ſo palpable, ſo numerous, ſo different, ſo linked together, and ſo connected with a moſt important end, that it was morally impoſſible that the witneſſes could be deceiv-

deceived, their martyrdom muſt be conſidered as the laſt ſeal of their teſtimony.

And if the declared enemies of the witneſſes, their own countrymen and contemporaries, ſhould aſcribe the greateſt part of the miraculous facts to a cauſe very different from that aſſigned by the witneſſes, this circumſtance would appear an indirect acknowledgment of thoſe facts: for men do not aſcribe a cauſe for facts which they think falſe; but they deny them, and prove their falſity, if they are able to do ſo.—This acknowledgment will acquire great force, if thoſe enemies of the witneſſes were at the ſame time their lawful ſuperiors, and if they poſſeſſed all the means which power and autho-

authority can ſupply, to confute a preſumptuous impoſture; and if they never confuted it. What ſhould we think then, if we learned that the witneſſes, whom their own magiſtrates could not confound, conſtantly perſevered in charging thoſe magiſtrates with the greateſt of crimes, and that they even dared to accuſe them face to face?

INTERESTING VIEWS

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

SECTION I.

GENERAL CHARACTERS OF THE WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL, AND OF THEIR DEPOSITION.

A BOOK, ſaid to contain the faithful depoſitions of men, who call themſelves witneſſes and ſervants of a Meſſenger from heaven, is put into my hand. I examine this book with all poſſible attention, and confeſs, the more I examine it, the more

more I am ſtruck with the characters of probability, originality, and grandeur, which I diſcover in it, and which, in my opinion, render it a moſt ſingular and inimitable work.

The elevation of thought, the majeſtic ſimplicity of expreſſion; the beauty, the purity and harmony of the doctrine; the importance, univerſality, and ſmall number of the precepts; their admirable ſuitableneſs to the nature and neceſſities of man; the ardent charity ſo generouſly enforced; the unction, the force and gravity of the language; its concealed and truly philoſophical meaning; theſe eſpecially arreſt my attention, becauſe I do not find them in any production of the human mind,

mind, in the ſame degree of excellence.

I am, at the ſame time, very much ſtruck with the candour, the ingenuouſneſs, the modeſty, and, I muſt add, the humility of the writers, and with that ſingular and perpetual neglect of themſelves, which never allows them to intermingle their own reflections, nor even the leaſt eulogium in recounting the actions of their Maſter.

When I ſee theſe writers narrating with ſo much ſimplicity and coolneſs, the moſt weighty matters, and never attempting to aſtoniſh, but always to enlighten and convince, I muſt acknowledge, that their ſole end is to atteſt to mankind a truth,

which

which they judge to be of the higheſt importance to their happineſs.

As they appear to me entirely occupied with this truth, and inattentive to their own perſonal concerns, it does not ſurprize me, that they ſhould look to it alone; that their only wiſhes are to exhibit it to view, and that they never think of giving it embelliſhments. With the utmoſt ſimplicity therefore do they ſay, *The leper ſtretched out his hand, and it was reſtored whole. The ſick man took up his bed, and walked.*

This book exhibits the true *ſublime:* for when it ſpeaks of GOD, nothing can be more truly ſo, than *He wills, and the thing is done.* But I can eaſily judge, that this ſublimity is found in

in it, for this reaſon only, that the thing itſelf is of an *extraordinary* nature, and that the writers repreſented it juſt as they ſaw it, juſt as it was, and have not mixed with it any other matter.

Theſe writers appear not only to poſſeſs the moſt perfect ingenuouſneſs, and even to make no attempts to diſſemble their own faults, but, what is moſt ſurprizing, they have not diſſembled certain circumſtances of the life and ſufferings of their *Maſter*, which, in the eyes of the world, do not tend to elevate his glory. If they had ſuppreſſed them, they would moſt aſſuredly have been beyond the reach of diſcovery, and their adverſaries could not have drawn any advantage from them.

They

They have not ſimply mentioned, but given them in full detail. I am therefore obliged to admit, that in their writings they propoſed no other end, but to render teſtimony to the truth.

Was it poſſible, I frequently aſk myſelf, that thoſe fiſhermen, who performed greater things than their Maſter did, who ſaid to the lame, *Riſe and walk, and he walks*, ſhould have had not the ſmalleſt particle of vanity, and diſdained the applauſes of the people, who were ſpectators of their prodigies?

With equal admiration and ſurprize, therefore, I read theſe words: "Ye men of Iſrael, why marvel ye "at this, and why look ye ſo earneſtly

" neſtly upon us, *as though by* our " own power and holineſs we had " made this man to walk?" Can I forget the humility, diſintereſtedneſs and truth, expreſſed in this characteriſtical paſſage? I have a heart made for feeling, and I confeſs I am moved every time I read theſe words.

What are theſe men, therefore, who, when nature obeys their voice, are afraid that this obedience ſhould be aſcribed *to their own power and holineſs?* Can I reject ſuch witneſſes? Is it conceivable, that ſuch things could have been invented? And how many other things do I diſcover, which are indiſſolubly linked to theſe, and which do not naturally occur to the human mind!

SECTION II.

PARTICULAR CHARACTER OF THE DEPOSITION.—HAS IT BEEN FORMALLY CONTRADICTED BY CONTEMPORARY DEPOSITIONS OF EQUAL FORCE?

I KNOW that ſeveral *parts* of the depoſition appeared in a very ſhort time after the events, atteſted by the witneſſes. If theſe are the work of any impoſtor, he will undoubtedly take great care, not to be very circumſtantial in his narrative, that he may not furniſh the ready means of his own confuſion. Nothing, however, can be more *circumſtantial*, than this *depoſition* now before me: in

in it I find the names of ſeveral perſons, their quality, their offices, their places of abode, their maladies: I ſee places, times, circumſtances, diſtinctly marked, and a hundred other minute details; all which concur in determining the *event* moſt preciſely. In a word, I cannot doubt but that if I had lived in the place, and at the time in which the *depoſition* was publiſhed, it would have been very eaſy for me to aſcertain the truth of the *facts*. And this ſurely I ſhould not have failed to do; would it have been neglected by the moſt obſtinate and powerful enemies of the witneſſes?

I ſearch therefore in the hiſtory of the times, for *depoſitions* formally contradicting the depoſition of the witneſſes,

and the aſtoniſhing ſucceſs of the teſtimony given to the *facts* upon which they grounded their accuſation. How eaſily could magiſtrates, who had in their hands the management of the police, have judicially contradicted this teſtimony! How much were they intereſted to do ſo! What might not have been the effect of a judicial and circumſtantial depoſition, bearing on every page a refutation of that of the witneſſes?

Since, therefore, the *ſociety*, of which I am ſpeaking, cannot produce in its own favour a *depoſition* of this ſort, I am juſtly authorized to think, that it never could advance any valid objection againſt the *witneſſes*.

It

It comes ſtrongly into my mind, that the friends of the witneſſes, after they became powerful, might have deſtroyed the writings adverſe to their cauſe. But they have not been able to deſtroy this great *ſociety*, their declared enemy; and they did not become powerful till many ages after the *event*, which was the principal object of the *teſtimony*. I am, therefore, obliged to abandon a ſuppoſition, which appears to be deſtitute of foundation.

While the *Jewiſh ſociety* confines itſelf to the moſt vague accuſations of impoſture, I ſee the *witneſſes* inſert in their writings, *examinations* before the magiſtrates and principal doctors of the ſociety, and *interrogations* put by them: which prove, at leaſt, that

they were not indifferent to what paſſed in their capital.

I cannot preſume there was any ſuch indifference; the improbability of the thing is too great. I preſume, on the contrary, that thoſe magiſtrates or doctors did not neglect to inform themſelves of the facts. I, therefore, ſcrutinize the *examinations* and *interrogations*, contained in the *writings* of the *witneſſes*, or of their firſt adherents. And as theſe *writings* have not been formally contradicted by men, who had the greateſt reaſon to do ſo, I cannot, I think, deny that they are of great force.

I always taſte a new pleaſure, when I peruſe thoſe intereſting *in-*

terrogations; the more I peruſe them, the more I admire the exquiſite judgment, the ſingular preciſion, the noble courage and candour, which ſhine forth in the *anſwers.* Here the truth appears to iſſue from all ſides, and a reading is ſufficient to convince any man, that ſuch *facts* could not have been forged. If they are an invention, where are there ſuch inventions?

SECTION III.

THE MAN LAME FROM HIS BIRTH.

THE witneſſes ſcarcely commence their atteſtation of what they call the *truth*, when I ſee them brought before the tribunals of the capital. They are examined and interrogated, and boldly atteſt, before thoſe tribunals, the ſame things which they had atteſted before the people.

A man lame from his birth receives a cure. Two of the *witneſſes* are conſidered as the authors of this cure. The ſenators ſummon them, and put this queſtion to them, "*By what power, or by what name,* "have

" have ye done this?" The queſtion is preciſe, and in form. " *Ye rulers of the people*," anſwer the witneſſes, " if we this day be examined of the " good deed done to the impotent " man, by what means he is made " whole, be it known unto you all, " and to all the people, that by the " name of *Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth*, " whom ye crucified, whom God " raiſed from the dead, by him doth " this man ſtand here before you " whole."

What! do the two fiſhermen make no attempts to conciliate the favour of their judges? They begin by openly reproaching them with an atrocious crime, and conclude with affirming the moſt ſhocking fact, in the eyes of thoſe judges!

Now if he who was crucified by the magiſtrates was juſtly put to death, if he is not riſen again, if the miracle wrought upon the blind man be another fraud; theſe magiſtrates, who undoubtedly poſſeſs proofs of all this, will loudly and publicly reproach the two *witneſſes* with their effrontery, their impoſture, and wicked contrivance, and puniſh them with the utmoſt rigour.

I continue to read the narrative. When the rulers of the people ſaw the boldneſs of the two diſciples, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with him that was crucified: and beholding the man who was healed ſtanding

ſtanding with them, they could ſay nothing againſt it. And when they had commanded them to go aſide out of the council, they conferred among themſelves. "And when "they had conferred, they called "them, and commanded them not "to ſpeak at all, nor teach in the "name of the crucified Jeſus."

What do I behold! Thoſe magiſtrates, ſo deeply prejudiced againſt the *witneſſes*, and their declared enemies, cannot confound them! Thoſe magiſtrates, to whom two of the witneſſes have ſpoken with ſo much boldneſs, and ſo little caution, confine themſelves to *threats* and *forbidding them to teach!* Has the lame man then been healed? But in the name of the *crucified* he was healed.

Has he then riſen again? Do the magiſtrates then tacitly acknowledge this *reſurrection?* Their conduct appears to me to demonſtrate, at leaſt, that they could not prove the contrary.

I cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe, that the hiſtorian of the fiſhermen has fabricated this whole procedure; becauſe it does not belong to me, who am removed, more than ſeventeen centuries, from that hiſtorian, to form againſt him an accuſation, which ought to have been brought forward by his contemporaries, particularly by the countrymen of the witneſſes; and becauſe this has never been brought forward, or has at leaſt never been proved.

I learn

I learn from this writer, that *five thouſand perſons* were converted at the ſight of the *miracle*. I ſhall not ſay, that theſe are five thouſand witneſſes; I have not their depoſitions; but I will ſay, that ſo conſiderable a number of converts is at leaſt a proof of the *notoriety* of the *fact*. I ſhall not pretend to ſay, that this number is exaggerated; becauſe I have no valid authority to oppoſe againſt the writer, and my ſimple *negative* would be no authority againſt his expreſs *affirmative*.

I cannot reſiſt dwelling a little upon ſome expreſſions of this intereſting narrative.

Such as I have, give I thee: in the name of the Lord, riſe up and walk!

Such

Such as I have, give I thee: he has nothing but the power to make a lame man walk, and this power reſides in a poor fiſherman. *In the name of the Lord, riſe up and walk!* How preciſe! How ſublime! How worthy the majeſty of Him who commandeth nature!

If we be examined for the good deed done to the impotent man; it is an act of mercy, not of oſtentation. They did not make ſigns appear in the heavens: *they did a good deed to an impotent man: good* indeed! and in the ſimplicity of an honeſt and virtuous heart.

Whom ye crucified, and whom God raiſed from the dead. No ſalvo, no palliative, no conſideration, no perſonal

ſonal fears; are they therefore very ſure of their fact, and under no apprehenſions of being confounded? When ſpeaking to the people, they had ſaid, *We wot that through ignorance ye did it:* they do not ſay ſo before the tribunal. They were apparently afraid of having the air of flattering their judges, and deſiring to obtain their favour. *Whom ye crucified, and whom God raiſed from the dead.*

SEC-

SECTION IV.

ST. PAUL.

I Continue to turn over the hiſtorian of the witneſſes, and quickly meet with the hiſtory of a young man, who excites my curioſity very much.

Though educated at the foot of a ſage, he does not glory in imitating his moderation. His lively, ardent, courageous character, his perſecuting ſpirit, his blind attachment to the ſanguinary maxims of a domineering ſect, make him paſſionately deſirous of diſtinguiſhing himſelf in the open war which that ſect declares

clares againſt the *witneſſes*. He accordingly conſents to the violent death of one of the witneſſes, and aſſiſts at the execution. But his impetuous fanatical zeal being inſatiable, and not to be confined within the circle of the capital, he goes to his ſuperiors, and demands letters from them, authorizing him to perſecute the adherents of the new opinion in ſtrange cities.

He ſets out, accompanied by ſeveral attendants; *he breathes threatenings and ſlaughter;* and yet arrives not at the place of his deſtination, before he himſelf becomes a miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt. That city, whither he was going, to vent his rage againſt the infant ſociety, is the very place in which he commences his public

public miniſtry, and his atteſtation of the *facts* atteſted by the *witneſſes* of the truth of Chriſtianity.

The *moral* world has its *laws* as well as the *phyſical:* men do not throw off their characters all at once, and without a cauſe, they do not, all at once; and without a cauſe, renounce their moſt deeply rooted, their deareſt, and, in their own eyes, moſt lawful prejudices, and much leſs the prejudices of birth, of education, and of religion in particular.

What then has happened upon the road to this furious perſecutor, to render him all at once the zealous diſciple of Him whom he perſecuted? For I muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe

poſe a cauſe, and a great cauſe too, for ſo ſudden and extraordinary a change. His hiſtorian, and he himſelf, inform me of this cauſe: a light from heaven ſhone around him: its brightneſs deprived him of ſight: he fell to the ground, and heard the voice of the Meſſenger addreſſing him.

In a very ſhort time, he becomes the object of the fury of that ſect which he has abandoned: he is dragged to priſons; brought before the tribunals of his own nation, and before thoſe of ſtrangers; and every where atteſts, with equal firmneſs and conſtancy, the *facts* depoſed by the firſt *witneſſes*.

I take

I take pleaſure, in particular, to follow him before a ſtrange tribunal, where a king of his own nation happened to be preſent. There I hear him recount, in minute detail, the hiſtory of his converſion: he does not diſſemble his former fury; nay, he paints it in the ſtrongeſt colours: *When they were put to death*, ſays he, *I gave my voice againſt them: I oft compelled them to blaſpheme; and being exceedingly mad againſt them, I perſecuted them even unto ſtrange cities.* He then proceeds to the extraordinary circumſtances of his converſion, relates what followed it, atteſts the reſurrection of Jeſus, and concludes with an addreſs to his judge: *The king knoweth of theſe things, before whom alſo I ſpeak freely; for I am perſuaded, that none of theſe things are hidden*

hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Is the new *witneſs*, therefore, not more afraid, than the firſt were, of being contradicted? becauſe he ſpeaks of *things which were not done in a corner.* And I am not much ſurprized to ſee that this diſcourſe ſtaggers the prince: *Almoſt thou perſuadeſt me.* Does the prince then believe him to be an *impoſtor?*

This *witneſs* had advanced the ſame things in the capital, when ſpeaking to a numerous aſſembly of the people, and was not interrupted until he had ſhocked an ancient and favourite prejudice of this proud nation, reſpecting the calling of the *Gentiles.*

In

" ſee my face any more. . . . I have
" coveted no man's ſilver, or gold,
" or apparel; and you yourſelves
" know, that theſe hands have mi-
" niſtered to my neceſſities, and to
" them that were with me. I have
" ſhewn you all things, how that,
" ſo labouring, you ought to ſup-
" port the weak, and to remember
" the words of the Lord, that it
" is more bleſſed to give, than to
" receive. My face —— Theſe
" hands—."

I am aſtoniſhed at the number, the kind, the greatneſs, and the duration of the labours and trials of this extraordinary perſonage: and if glory is to be meaſured by importance of deſign, nobleneſs of motives, and obſtacles to be ſurmounted,

mounted, he muſt be conſidered as a true hero.

But this hero has himſelf written: I ſtudy his productions, and am ſtruck with the extreme diſintereſtedneſs, the gentleneſs, the ſingular unction, and above all the ſublime benevolence, which ſhine in all his writings. The whole human race *is not ſtraitened in his heart.* There is no branch of morality, which does not vegetate and bring forth fruit with him. He is himſelf a Morality which lives and breathes, and is inceſſantly in action. He gives at once example and precept: and what precepts!

"Let your charity be without diſ-
"ſimulation. Abhor that which is
"evil,

" evil, cleave to that which is good.
" Be kindly affectioned one to ano-
" ther with brotherly love; in ho-
" nour preferring one another; not
" ſlothful in buſineſs; diſtributing
" to the neceſſitous; given to hoſ-
" pitality. Bleſs them who perſe-
" cute you. Bleſs, and curſe not.
" Rejoice with them that rejoice,
" and weep with them that weep.
" Be of the ſame mind one towards
" another. Mind not high things,
" but be condeſcending. Be not
" wiſe in your own conceits."

How could a morality ſo exalted, ſo pure, and ſo well adapted to the wants of univerſal ſociety, be dictated by the very man *who breathed threatenings and ſlaughter*, and who placed

placed his delight and glory in torturing his fellow-men? But, above all, how has ſuch a man come all at once to *practiſe* a morality ſo perfect? Has HE, then, who came to recal men to thoſe grand maxims, *ſpoken* to him?

What ſhall I ſay alſo of that admirable picture of *charity*, ſo full of warmth and life, exhibited in another work of this extraordinary moraliſt, and which I am never wearied of contemplating? It is, however, not the picture itſelf which ſo much commands my attention, as the occaſion which produced it. Of all the gifts which men can obtain or exerciſe, there is, beyond all contradiction, none more calculated

to flatter their vanity than miraculous gifts. Mean and illiterate men, who all at once are enabled to ſpeak foreign languages, are very much tempted to make a parade of ſo extraordinary a gift, and to forget its *end*.

Accordingly, by a numerous ſociety of new converts, founded by this illuſtrious man, this gift is very ſoon abuſed: he delays not to write to them, and in the ſtrongeſt terms to recal them to the true employment of *miracles*: he heſitates not highly to prefer before all *miraculous* gifts, that ſublime benevolence, which he calls *charity*, and which, according to him, is the moſt perfect aſſemblage of all the ſocial virtues.

tues. "Though I ſpeak with the "tongues of men and angels, and "have not charity, I am become as "ſounding braſs, or a tinkling cym-"bal. And though I have the gift "of prophecy, and underſtand all "myſteries and all knowledge; and "though I have all faith, ſo that I "could remove mountains, and "have not charity, I am nothing."

How has this ſage learned to make ſo juſt an eſtimate of things? How is he not dazzled with the eminent gifts he poſſeſſes, or at leaſt believes he poſſeſſes? Would an impoſtor uſe them in this manner? Who diſcovered to him that *miracles* are only ſimple *ſigns to them who do not yet believe?* Who taught this fana-

tical perſecutor to prefer the love of mankind to the moſt brilliant gifts? In the precepts and virtues of the diſciple, can I fail to perceive the efficacious voice of that Maſter, who ſacrificed himſelf for the human race?

SEC-

SECTION V.

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

THE depoſition of the *witneſſes* contain frequent *interrogatories*, which very much excite my attention. In theſe muſt I chiefly ſearch for the ſources of the *probability* of the *facts* atteſted. If, as I have remarked, theſe interrogatories have never been formally contradicted by thoſe who had the greateſt intereſt to do ſo, I cannot reaſonably refuſe the conſequences which naturally follow.

Among theſe interrogatories, there is one in particular which I never

read without a ſecret pleaſure; that reſpecting a man born blind, who was cured by the Meſſenger. This miracle greatly aſtoniſhes all who had known the blind man; it occupies their whole thoughts and converſations. They bring him before the Doctors: the Doctors interrogate him, and demand *how he had received his ſight? He put clay upon mine eyes*, replied he, *and I waſhed, and do ſee.*

The Doctors are not diſpoſed to believe the *fact*. They doubt, and are divided. They wiſh to ſatisfy their doubts; and ſuſpecting that the man *had not been blind, they call his parents*, and aſk them, *Is this your ſon, whom you ſay was born blind? How then doth he now ſee?*

The

The parents anſwer, "We know "that this is our ſon, and that he "was born blind; but by what "means he now ſeeth, we know "not: he is of age, aſk him: he "will ſpeak for himſelf."

The Doctors a ſecond time interrogate the man that was blind: "Give God the praiſe," ſay they, "we know that he, who thou ſayeſt "opened thine eyes, is a ſinner." "Whether he be a ſinner," replies he, "I know not: one thing I know, "that whereas I was blind, now I "ſee."

Upon this ingenuous anſwer, the Doctors recur to their firſt queſtion, "What did he to thee? how open-"ed he thine eyes?" "I have told

" you already," replies the man, equally firm as ingenuous; " where-" fore would you hear it again? " Will you alſo be his diſciples?"

At this reply the Doctors are irritated: they revile him. " We know " not," ſay they, " from whence he " is, of whom thou ſpeakeſt." " *Why*, " *herein is a marvellous thing, that ye* " *know not from whence he is*," boldly replies this man of candour and good ſenſe, " *and yet he has opened* " *mine eyes*," &c.

How ſimple! how natural! how preciſe! how intereſting! how coherent! If the truth be not told here, by what characters ſhall I be able to diſcover it?

SEC-

SECTION VI.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE FOUNDER.

BUT of all the *judicial proceedings* contained in the *depoſition* of the witneſſes, there is unqueſtionably none more important, than that which immediately concerns the perſon of the Meſſenger himſelf. It is alſo the moſt circumſtantial, the oftener repeated, and that to which all the witneſſes make the moſt direct and moſt frequent alluſions. Here their teſtimony always centres. I meet with it in all the principal parts of the *depoſition*; and when I compare them with one another, upon this

eſſential point, they appear very *harmonious.*

The Meſſenger is ſeized, examined, and interrogated by the magiſtrates of his own nation: they charge him to declare who he is: he does ſo: his anſwer is called *blaſphemy:* falſe witneſſes are brought againſt him, and they equivocate: he is condemned, and delivered over to a ſuperior and foreign tribunal: there he is again interrogated: he gives nearly the ſame anſwers; the judge, convinced of his innocence, is deſirous of releaſing him; the magiſtrates, who condemned him, perſiſt in demanding his death: they intimidate the ſuperior judge, who abandons him to their fury: he is crucified, and buried: the magiſtrates

ſeal

ſeal up the ſepulchre: they place their own guards upon it, and in a very ſhort time after, the witneſſes atteſt in the capital, and before thoſe very magiſtrates, *that he who was crucified is riſen again.*

Theſe are the moſt eſſential facts: I compare them together, and analyze them; and diſcover only two hypotheſes which can ſatisfactorily account for the *final event.*

Either the witneſſes have carried away the body, or the Meſſenger is really riſen again. I muſt decide between theſe two hypotheſes, for I cannot diſcover a third.

In the firſt place, I conſider the particular opinions, the prejudices, the

the character of the witneſſes; I obſerve their conduct, their circumſtances, the ſituation of their ſpirits and of their hearts, before and after the death of their *Maſter*.

In the ſecond place, I examine the prejudices, character, conduct, and allegations of their adverſaries.

The country of the witneſſes is ſufficient to point out their opinions and prejudices in the general. I know that their nation profeſſes to expect a temporal deliverer, and that he is the deareſt object of their wiſhes and hopes. The witneſſes, therefore, alſo expect this deliverer; and I find in their *writings*, many circumſtances which confirm me in this opinion, and prove that they were

were perſuaded, that He whom they call their Maſter was to be this *temporal* deliverer. In vain does this Maſter endeavour to ſpiritualize their ideas: they do not diveſt themſelves of the *national* prejudice, by which they are ſo ſtrongly poſſeſſed. *We truſted that it had been he who ſhould have redeemed our nation.*

Theſe men, whoſe ideas riſe not above ſenſible things, have a ſimplicity and timidity, which they themſelves do not conceal. Every moment they miſtake the meaning of their Maſter's diſcourſes; and when he is ſeized, they fly. The moſt zealous amongſt them, thrice, and even with imprecations, denies that he ever knew him; and I ſee this ſhameful cowardice minutely deſcrib-

deſcribed in the four principal *depoſitions.*

I cannot doubt for one moment, but that they were thoroughly perſuaded of the reality of the miracles wrought by their *Maſter*, for their *ſenſes* alone were ſufficient to aſcertain that a paralytic walks; that a man formerly blind, now ſees; that a dead man riſes again. Neither can I doubt, that they were attached to this Maſter by a train of ideas, which they had formed to themſelves reſpecting the *end* of his miſſion. The attachments of men have always a foundation; and the men of whom I ſpeak, muſt have hoped for ſomething from him, to whoſe fate they had linked their own.

They

They hoped, then, at leaſt, that he would have redeemed their nation from a foreign yoke: but that Maſter, from whom they expected this great deliverance, is betrayed, delivered up, abandoned, condemned, crucified and buried, and with him all their temporal hopes vaniſh.—*He who had ſaved others, could not ſave himſelf:* his enemies triumph, his friends are humbled, aſtoniſhed, and confounded.

In ſuch deſperate circumſtances, will the witneſſes conceive the extravagant project of carrying away the body of their Maſter? Shall I eaſily perſuade myſelf, that ſuch a project could have entered into the heads of people ſo ſimple, ſo unpoliſhed, ſo timid, ſo devoid of intrigue?

trigue? What! will thoſe very men, who have but now abandoned their Maſter in ſo cowardly a manner, form all at once the ſtrange reſolution of carrying away his body, in oppoſition to the ſecular arm! Will they openly expoſe themſelves to the greateſt dangers! Will they brave a certain and cruel death! And with what views?

Either they are perſuaded that their Maſter *will riſe again*, or they are not: if they are, it is evident, that they will reſign his body to the Divine Power; if they are not, all their *temporal* hopes muſt be annihilated. What then could they propoſe to themſelves by carrying away the body, by publiſhing that he had riſen again? But will men of this com-

complexion, men without credit, without fortune, without authority, ever hope to procure any belief to ſo monſtrous an impoſture?

The exploit perhaps was eaſily effected: but the ſepulchre is ſealed; guards ſurround it; and thoſe guards have been choſen, and placed there, by the very men who had the greateſt intereſt to prevent the impoſture. How well ſuited were ſuch precautions to drive from the minds of timid fiſhermen every idea of carrying away the body! Will men, who have neither ſilver nor gold, undertake to corrupt thoſe guards? Will men, hated and deſpiſed by the government, find any hardy enough to lend them aſſiſtance? Will they flatter

ter themſelves, that their aſſiſtants will not betray them?

But am I certain, that the ſepulchre was ſealed, and that guards were placed upon it? I obſerve that this important, deciſive *circumſtance*, is to be found only in the *depoſition* of *Matthew*, and I am a little aſtoniſhed at this. I carefully enquire, therefore, whether this eſſential circumſtance of the narrative was contradicted by thoſe who were moſt directly concerned to do ſo, and I am ſatisfied it never has been contradicted. I muſt therefore admit, that the relation of the *witneſs* remains in full force; and that the mere ſilence of the other authors of the *written depoſition*, cannot in the leaſt

leaſt degree invalidate his teſtimony on this point.

Independently of a teſtimony ſo expreſs, how improbable is it in itſelf, that magiſtrates, who have great reaſon to dread an impoſture, and who have in their hands the means to prevent it, will neglect to make uſe of thoſe means! And if they have not made uſe of them, what reaſons can I aſſign for their conduct?

It will appear ſtill more probable, that thoſe magiſtrates have taken all the neceſſary precautions, if I have proofs that they previouſly thought of the means of oppoſing the impoſture. "Sir! we remember that "that deceiver ſaid, while he was "yet alive, After three days I ſhall "riſe

better calculated to ſtop the progreſs of the impoſture, and to confound the impoſtors?

Theſe magiſtrates, though ſo deeply intereſted to confound the impoſture, do not purſue a method ſo direct, ſo clear, and ſo judicial. They do not even ſecure the perſons of the impoſtors. They do not confront them with the guards. They puniſh neither the impoſtors nor the guards. They publiſh no legal proceeding. They do not ſatisfy the public. Neither do their deſcendants give more information, but confine themſelves, as their fathers had done, to the ſimple affirmation of impoſture.

But, what is more; when thoſe very magiſtrates, in a ſhort time after

after, ſummon before them two of the principal diſciples, upon occaſion of a cure which makes a noiſe, and when thoſe diſciples dare accuſe them to their faces of a great crime, and atteſt in their preſence the reſurrection of him, *whom they crucified;* what do the magiſtrates do? They ſatisfy themſelves with *threatening the two diſciples, and forbidding them to teach.* Thoſe menaces do not intimidate the *witneſſes*; they continue to proclaim aloud in the ſame place, and under the very eye of the police, the reſurrection of the crucified Jeſus. They are again ſummoned before the magiſtrates; they appear, and with the ſame boldneſs perſiſt in their depoſition: *The God of our fathers raiſed up him whom ye ſlew.—We are his witneſſes.* What do the magiſtrates now? They

beat

beat the witneſſes, repeat their firſt prohibition, and let them go.

Here are circumſtantial facts; facts which have never been contradicted: facts conſtantly and unanimouſly atteſted by *witneſſes*, who, I muſt acknowledge, do poſſeſs all the qualities which conſtitute the beſt foundation for the *credibility* of *teſtimony*. Shall I, to invalidate ſuch facts, ſay, that the *fear of the people* prevented the magiſtrates from making *enquiries*, from judicially proſecuting and puniſhing the *witneſſes* as *impoſtors*, from publiſhing authentic, *legal proceedings*, &c.? But if Jeſus Chriſt, during his life-time, had done nothing to excite the admiration and veneration of the people: if he had wrought no miracle: if the people

had

not bleſſed God for having *given*
ien ſuch power: if the doctrine of
iſt, and his manner of teaching,
not far excelled every thing they
heard from their own Doctors:
ıey had not been convinced that
r man ſpake like him: why ſhould
magiſtrates have had any thing
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ecuting an impoſtor's abject diſ-
es, who were themſelves alſo
oſtors? How ſhould the magiſ-
es have had any thing to fear
ı a people ſo ſtrongly, and for ſo
; a time, prejudiced in their fa-
', if they could have proved, by
l public proceedings, that the
of the man born blind, the re-
ection of Lazarus, the cure of the
e man, the gift of tongues, &c.
e only ſhew tricks? How eaſily

might they have taken informations upon ſuch facts! How eaſily in particular could they have proved moſt rigorouſly, that the witneſſes ſpoke only their mother tongue! What reaſon had the magiſtrates to *fear the people*, if they could have *judicially* demonſtrated, that the diſciples had carried away the body of their Maſter? And was it more difficult to prove this than the reſt?

Can I now have any doubt of the extreme improbability of the firſt *hypotheſis*, that the body *was carried away?* Can I *reaſonably* refuſe to admit, that the ſecond *hypotheſis* has at leaſt a degree of probability equal to that of any fact whatſoever, in the hiſtory of the ſame age, or of the ages immediately following?

Shall

Shall I here delineate the fright-
l picture of the character of the
incipal adverſaries? Shall I draw
is picture from their own hiſtorian
ſephus? Shall I ſet this character
oppoſition to that of the witneſſes?
ice to virtue; fury to moderation;
pocriſy to ſincerity; falſhood to
uth? I ſhould forget that I am
aking only a *ſketch*, and not a
eatiſe.

The *reſurrection* of the Meſſenger
not an *unconnected* fact, but is the
ief link of a chain of facts of the
me ſort, and of a multitude of
cts of every ſort, all of which
ould be abſolutely inexplicable, if
e firſt were ſuppoſed to be *falſe*?
, in any matter whatever, an *hy-
theſis* be ſo much the more *probable*,

as it the more happily explains a greater number of facts, or a greater number of eſſential *particulars* of a fact; ſhall I not in ſound argument be obliged to grant, that the firſt *hypotheſis* explains nothing, and that the ſecond explains every thing moſt happily and moſt naturally?

Shall I add, that if the Meſſenger be not *riſen*, he has been a moſt extraordinary impoſtor? for by the confeſſion of the *witneſſes*, he had predicted his own *death* and *reſurrection*, and eſtabliſhed a *memorial* of both. If he is not riſen, therefore, his diſciples muſt have thought that he had deceived them in this moſt important point; and if they thought ſo, how could they have founded upon a reſurrection, which did

did not take place, ſuch exalted hopes of *future happineſs?* In his name, how could they have announced to the human race this future happineſs? How could they have expoſed themſelves, for ſo long a period, to ſo many contradictions, to ſuch cruel trials, to death itſelf, in ſupport of a *doctrine*, which entirely reſted on a *falſe* fact, and the falſity of which was ſo manifeſtly known to them? How could men, who made ſo public, ſo conſtant, and apparently ſo ſincere a profeſſion of the moſt delicate and noble love towards mankind, have been ſo unnatural as to deceive many thouſands of their fellow-men, and precipitate them along with themſelves into an abyſs of miſery? How could extraordinary impoſtors have hoped to be

rewarded, in another life, for the ſufferings they endured in this? How could ſuch impoſtors teach men the moſt pure, the moſt ſublime doctrine, and that beſt ſuited to the wants of univerſal ſociety?——But I have already inſiſted long enough upon theſe monſtrous contradictions to common ſenſe: here they preſent themſelves in ſo great numbers, and are ſo ſtriking, that I need only reflect upon them a few moments, to be ſenſible on which ſide the greateſt *probability* lies.

Shall I object, that the *reſurrection* of the Meſſenger was not ſufficiently *public*, and that he ought to have ſhewn himſelf in the capital, after his reſurrection, and eſpecially to his judges? I ſhall at firſt ſight perceive,

ceive, that the queſtion does not at all reſpect the knowledge of what God could have done, but of that ſolely which he has done. God would ſpeak to man as an *intelligent* and *moral* being; he would not *force* him to believe, and thus leave his underſtanding unexerciſed. I have, therefore, only to ſatisfy myſelf, that the reſurrection of the Meſſenger was accompanied with circumſtances ſufficiently deciſive, and was preceded and followed by *facts* ſufficiently ſtriking to convince a *rational* man, of the *extraordinary* miſſion of the Meſſenger. Now when I examine all the circumſtances and facts; when I weigh them in the balance of reaſon, I cannot deny that God has done all that was *ſufficient* to give a reaſonable man that

moral certainty, reſpecting his future exiſtence, which he wanted, which he deſired with ſo much ardour, and which was ſo well ſuited to his *preſent* condition.

I acknowledge, likewiſe, that my objection to the defect of *notoriety* in the reſurrection of the Meſſenger, would involve in it a great abſurdity; becauſe, when I inveſtigate this objection, I ſhall very quickly perceive, that every individual of the human race might alſo require that the Meſſenger ſhould appear to him, &c.

I muſt not ſay, this or that is wiſe, therefore God has done, or ought to have done it; but I ought to ſay, God has done it, therefore it is wiſe.

Does

Does it become a being ſo profoundly ignorant, to pronounce upon the *ways* of Wiſdom itſelf? The only thing here proportioned to my limited faculties, is, to ſtudy the ways of *Adorable Wiſdom*, and to be ſenſible of the value of his kindneſs.

SECTION VII.

APPARENT CONTRARIETIES IN THE DEPOSITION.

AT firſt ſight, all the parts of the *depoſition* appeared to me very *harmonious*, or *convergent*. Nevertheleſs, I diſcover in them many varieties, both in the *form*, and *matter*. In theſe I perceive, at leaſt apparent *contrarieties*. I ſee difficulties reſpecting certain points of genealogy, certain places, certain perſons, &c. and I do not immediately find the ſolution of theſe difficulties.

As I have no *ſecret* intereſt to believe thoſe difficulties *inſolvable*, I do not begin by imagining they are ſo. I have ſtudied the *logic* of the heart and of the head; and am not entirely ignorant of *criticiſm*. I collect the *parallel* paſſages: I compare them together: I examine them minutely, and borrow the aid of the beſt interpreters. I ſee, that the difficulties very quickly diminiſh, that the light every moment increaſes, expands by degrees, reflects from every ſide, and illuminates the moſt obſcure parts of the object.

If, notwithſtanding, there ſhould be corners which the light has not brightened to my wiſh; if there remain ſhades which I cannot diſpel, it

it does not therefore come into my head, and far leſs into my heart, to draw conſequences againſt the *whole* of the *depoſition:* becauſe thoſe thin ſhades do not overpower the light, which the prominent parts of the picture ſo ſtrongly reflect.

I am, indeed, at liberty to *doubt*; the *philoſophical* doubt is the very road to truth: but I am not at liberty to fail in honeſty, becauſe *true* philoſophy is abſolutely incompatible with diſhoneſty, and becauſe the philoſophy of the heart is ſuperior to that of the head. If, in the critical examination of any author whatſoever, I am always to conduct myſelf by the moſt ſure and common rules of interpretation; if one

of

of thoſe *rules* directs me to form my judgment upon the *whole* of the circumſtances; if another teaches me, that ſlight difficulties can never invalidate that *whole*, when in other reſpects it bears the moſt eſſential characters of *truth*, or at leaſt of *probability*: why ſhould I refuſe to apply thoſe rules to the examination of the preſent *depoſition*, and why ſhould not I judge of this *depoſition* by its *whole*?

Do not thoſe apparent *contrarieties*, thoſe oppoſitions as to certain *names*, thoſe difficulties of various kinds, indicate moſt clearly, that the authors of the different *parts* of the *depoſition* have not copied from one another, and that each of them has re-

related what he knew from the *teſtimony* of his *own ſenſes*, or had heard from *eye-witneſſes*?

If the different *parts* of the *depoſition* had borne a great *reſemblance* to one another, not in the *form* only, but in the *matter*, ſhould I not have had cauſe to ſuſpect, that they had all come from the ſame hand, or that they had been tranſcribed from each other? and would not this *ſuſpicion*, which is both juſt and natural, have greatly weakened the *validity* of the *depoſition*?

Am I not much better ſatisfied, when I ſee one of thoſe authors thus begin his narration? "Foraſmuch "as many have taken in hand to ſet "forth

" forth in order a declaration of " thoſe things which are moſt ſurely " believed among us; even as they " delivered them to us, who from " the beginning were eye-witneſſes " and miniſters of the word: it " ſeemed good to me alſo, having " had perfect underſtanding of all " things from the very firſt, to write " unto thee, in order that thou " mighteſt know the certainty of " thoſe things wherein thou haſt " been inſtructed." Do I not feel my ſatisfaction increaſe, when I read in the principal compoſition of one of the firſt witneſſes, " He that ſaw, " bare record, and his record is true; " and he knoweth that he ſaith true, " that ye might believe?" Or when I read in another compoſition of the ſame witneſs, " That which we have " heard

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" heard, which we have ſeen wit
" our eyes. which we have looke
" upon, and our hands have handle
" of the word of life, declare we un-
" to you."

SECTION VIII.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION.

HOW can I be aſſured of the *authenticity* of the moſt important parts of the *depoſition*?

I perceive, at firſt ſight, that I muſt not confound the *authenticity* of the depoſition with its *truth*. I, therefore, fix the meaning of the terms, that I may avoid all equivocation.

By the *authenticity* of any *part* of the depoſition, I mean, that degree

of

of *certainty* which convinces me, that that *part* was indeed written by the *author* whoſe *name* it bears.

The *truth* of the *depoſition* will be its *conformity* with the *facts*.

From this diſtinction, therefore, I underſtand, that *hiſtorical truth* does not depend upon the *authenticity* of the hiſtory: for I eaſily conceive, that a book may be very *conformable* to *facts*, and yet bear a *fictitious name*, or no name at all.

But if I am certain of the *authenticity* of the hiſtory, and if I know the hiſtorian to be a man of veracity, the authenticity of the hiſtory will perſuade me of its *truth*, or render it at leaſt very probable.

The

The book which I am examining did not fall from heaven: like all other books, it was written by men. I can *judge*, therefore, of the *authenticity* of this book, in the ſame manner as I do of the authenticity of all other books.

How do I know that the hiſtories of Thucydides, of Polybius, of Tacitus, &c. are indeed the *productions* of thoſe *authors*, whoſe *names* they bear? *Tradition* informs me of this. I aſcend from century to century; I conſult the *monuments* of different ages: I compare them with the hiſtories themſelves; and the general reſult of my enquiries is, that thoſe *hiſtories* have been conſtantly aſcribed to the *authors* whoſe names they bear at this day.

I can-

I cannot reaſonably ſuſpect the fidelity of this tradition: it is too ancient, too conſtant, too uniform, and has never been confuted.

I purſue, therefore, the ſame method in my enquiries into the *authenticity* of the *depoſition* in queſtion, and arrive at the ſame general and eſſential *reſult*.

But becauſe the hiſtory of Peloponneſus was much leſs intereſting to the Greeks, than the hiſtory of the Meſſenger was to his firſt followers, I cannot doubt, but that theſe have beſtowed much more attention in aſcertaining the *authenticity* of this hiſtory, than the Greeks did, in aſcertaining the authenticity of that of Thucydides.

Would

Would a *ſociety*, ſtrongly perſuaded that the book of which I am ſpeaking, contained the aſſurances of an eternal happineſs; would an afflicted, deſpiſed, perſecuted *ſociety*, which inceſſantly drew from this book thoſe conſolations and ſupports which its trials rendered ſo neceſſary; would this *ſociety*, I ſay, allow itſelf to be impoſed upon, as to the *authenticity* of a depoſition which became every day more precious?

Could a *ſociety*, among which the very authors of the *depoſition* had lived; which they themſelves had governed for ſeveral years, be deſtitute of *means* to aſcertain the *authenticity* of the writings of thoſe authors? Would it be perfectly indifferent about employing thoſe

means? Was it more difficult for this *ſociety* to obtain conviction of the authenticity of its writings, than it is for any ſociety whatever to aſcertain the authenticity of a writing, aſcribed to a perſon very well known to it, or who bears its name?

Could the *particular* and numerous ſocieties to which the *firſt witneſſes* addreſſed various *writings*, be miſtaken as to the *authenticity* of ſuch *writings?* Could they in the leaſt degree doubt whether thoſe *witneſſes* had written to them; whether they had anſwered different queſtions which they had propoſed to them; whether thoſe *witneſſes* had ſojourned amongſt them?

I approach as nearly as poſſible to the firſt age of that great *ſociety* founded by the *witneſſes*: I conſult the moſt ancient *monuments*, and diſcover, that almoſt at the birth of this *ſociety*, its members diſagreed about certain points of doctrine. I enquire into what paſſed at that time, among the parties at variance; and I ſee that thoſe, whom they call *heretics*, made their appeal, as well as the others, to the *depoſition* of the firſt witneſſes, and acknowledged its *authenticity*.

I diſcover, likewiſe, that the adverſaries * of all thoſe parties, adverſaries of learning and penetration, and who were removed but at

* Celſus, Porphyry, Julian, &c.

a ſmall

a ſmall diſtance from this firſt age, did not diſpute the authenticity of the principal *parts* of the *depoſition*.

I find this *depoſition* frequently quoted by writers † of great weight, who bordered upon this firſt age, and profeſſed to acknowledge its *authenticity*, as well as the validity of the *teſtimony* given, by the firſt *witneſſes*, to the *miraculous* facts. I compare thoſe *quotations* with the *depoſition* in my hand, and I cannot pretend to deny their conformity.

Proſecuting my enquiries, I diſcover, that a ſhort time after the birth of this ſociety, a great number of *falſe depoſitions* were publiſh-

† The apoſtolical fathers, and their immediate ſucceſſors.

ed

ed, ſome of which were quoted by the moſt reſpectable Doctors of the ſociety, as *being true*. From this I am at firſt led to infer, that it was not ſo difficult as I thought, to impoſe upon this ſociety, and even upon its principal *conductors*. This excites my attention and diſtruſt, and I cloſely inveſtigate this delicate point.

If a writing may be *true*, without being *authentic*, the *falſe depoſitions* in queſtion might be *true*, although they had not been *authentic*. Thoſe contemporary Doctors, who quoted them, apparently knew whether they were conformable to the *eſſential facts*, and I am myſelf acquainted with valid proofs that they were ſo. They were, therefore, *inauthentic hiſ-*

tories, rather than *falſe* hiſtories, or *romances*.

I ſee, beſides, that thoſe Doctors rarely *quoted* the *inauthentic hiſtories*, while they frequently *quoted* the *authentic*. I even diſcover, that ſome of thoſe *inauthentic* hiſtories were nothing but the authentic hiſtory either modified, or here and there interpolated.

I ought not to be aſtoniſhed at the great number of thoſe *inauthentic* hiſtories, which were at that time publiſhed throughout the world; I ought rather to be aſtoniſhed that there were not more of them. For I can eaſily conceive, that the zealous diſciples of the *principal* witneſſes, would moſt naturally commit

mit to writing what they had heard from their maſters, and give their *narratives* a *title* reſembling that of the *authentic parts.* Such *hiſtories* might be very conformable to the *eſſential facts;* ſince the authors received them immediately from the mouths of the *firſt witneſſes*, or at leaſt of their firſt diſciples.

I find that the *heretics* had alſo their *hiſtories*, differing more or leſs from the *authentic hiſtory:* but it is no difficult matter for me to aſcertain, that thoſe hiſtories, though forged with a malicious intention, contained the greater part of the *eſſential facts*, which had been atteſted by the *principal witneſſes.* Thoſe heretics appear to have been ſtrongly exaſperated againſt the oppoſite par-

ty, and ſince they have inſerted in their *hiſtories* the ſame *eſſential facts*, which that party profeſſed to believe, I cannot but conſider ſuch conformity between parties ſo very oppoſite, as the ſtrongeſt preſumption in favour of the *authenticity* and truth of the *depoſition* under review.

I obſerve, likewiſe, that the ſociety, which was the faithful depoſitary of the doctrine and writings of the witneſſes, did not fail to join its Doctors in declaiming againſt the heretics and their writings, and in conſtantly appealing to the authentic writings, as to the ſupreme and common judge of *all controverſy*. And the hiſtory of this ſociety informs me, that it was particularly careful to read its writings every week

week in its aſſemblies, and that they were preciſely the ſame which are at this day exhibited as the *authentic* depoſition of the *witneſſes*.

I cannot reaſonably ſuppoſe, therefore, that this ſociety would allow itſelf to be eaſily deceived with reſpect to the *authenticity* of the numerous writings, publiſhed in its own boſom. If there remained any reaſonable doubt upon this eſſential point, it would be diſpelled by one remarkable fact, namely, that this *ſociety* was ſo far from inconſiderately admitting writings as authentic which were not ſo, that for a long time it actually ſuſpected the *authenticity* of different writings, which, after continued and mature examination, were acknowledged to have

proceeded from the hand of the witneſſes.

This fact is ſupported by another ſtill more remarkable: in the hiſtory of that period, I read, that the members of this ſociety expoſed themſelves to the greateſt tortures, rather than deliver up to their perſecutors, thoſe books which they regarded as authentic and ſacred, and which thoſe violent perſecutors deſtined to the flames. Shall I preſume, that the moſt zealous partiſans of Grecian glory would have ſacrificed themſelves, to preſerve the writings of a Thucydides, or of a Polybius?

If, afterwards, I caſt my eye upon the beſt *accounts* of the *manuſcripts* of the

the *depoſition*, I ſhall find, that the principal *parts* of this depoſition bear, in thoſe manuſcripts, the *names* of the ſame authors, to whom this ſociety had always aſcribed them. This proof will appear ſo much the more convincing, the more probable it is, that ſome of thoſe *manuſcripts* lay claim to very high antiquity.

I have, therefore, in favour of the authenticity of this depoſition, the moſt ancient, moſt conſtant, and moſt uniform teſtimony of the ſociety with which it was depoſited; and I have alſo the *teſtimony* of the moſt ancient *heretics*, that of the moſt ancient *adverſaries*, and the authority of the moſt original *manuſcripts*.

How ſhould I riſe up at this day againſt ſo many united teſtimonies, and thoſe of ſo great weight? Am I more advantageouſly placed than the firſt *heretics*, or firſt *adverſaries*, to contradict the invariable and unanimous *teſtimony* of the *primitive ſociety?* Do I know any book of the ſame period, the *authenticity* of which is eſtabliſhed upon proofs ſo ſolid, ſo ſingular, ſo ſtriking, and of ſo many different kinds?

SECTION IX.

HAS THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION BEEN ALTERED, OR FABRICATED IN ITS ESSENTIAL PARTS?

I SHALL not inſiſt much with myſelf upon the *poſſibility* of certain *alterations* of the authentic text: I ſhall not ſay, that this text could have been *corrupted*. I ſee at once how extremely improbable it is, that it could have been ſo, during the lives of the *authors*: their oppoſition and authority would have very ſoon confounded the *corrupters*.

It would appear to me equally improbable, that ſuch corruptions

could have been executed with any ſucceſs, immediately after the death of the authors: their inſtructions and writings were too recent, and too well known.

The improbability would appear to me to increaſe infinitely in the ages following; for it would evidently increaſe, in direct proportion to the prodigious number of *copies*, and that multitude of *verſions* of the *authentic text*, which were inceſſantly made, and ſpeedily conveyed to all parts of the known world. How could ſo many *copies*, and ſo many *verſions*, be *corrupted* all at once? Nay, how could the very thought of doing ſo, enter into the head of any man?

Beſides,

Beſides, I know that the hiſtory of that time ſufficiently proves, that the firſt *heretics* did not begin to write till after the death of the firſt *witneſſes*. If thoſe *heretics*, in order to favour their own particular opinions, had undertaken to *corrupt* the *writings* of the witneſſes, or thoſe of their more illuſtrious diſciples, would not the numerous and vigilant ſociety, the guardian of thoſe writings, have immediately oppoſed them? And if this ſociety, in order to refute the heretics with greater ſucceſs, had itſelf dared to corrupt the authentic text, would thoſe heretics, who alſo appealed to this text, have been ſilent upon ſuch impoſtures?

All this will apply to the *fabrications*. It ſeems equally improbable, that *fabricated* writings could at any time be aſcribed to the witneſſes, as it does, that their own writings could be *corrupted*.

When I conſider the matter more cloſely, I can eaſily perceive, that the continual and multiplied *diviſions* of the ſociety, founded by the *witneſſes*, muſt naturally have preſerved the *authentic* text in its primitive integrity.

If thoſe diviſions afterwards broke out into open and bloody wars; if the parties at war always appealed to the authentic text, as to the abſolute arbitrator of their quarrels; if at length a new method be diſcovered

of

of multiplying to infinity the copies of the authentic text, and with no leſs diſpatch than accuracy; ſhall I not be under the moſt reaſonable obligation to admit, that the credibility of the *written depoſition* has loſt nothing through the lapſe of time; and that thoſe writings, which are at this day preſented to me as the genuine writings of the witneſſes, are indeed the ſame which have always been aſcribed to them?

SEC-

SECTION X.

VARIATIONS IN THE DEPOSITIONS.

THE *printed depoſition*, which I have in my hand, *repreſents*, therefore, the beſt *manuſcripts* of this depoſition, which have come down to my time; and theſe manuſcripts *repreſent* the moſt ancient and moſt *original manuſcripts*, of which they are copies.

But how many alterations of different kinds might not thoſe manuſcripts have undergone, from the injuries of time, the revolutions of ſtates and of ſocieties, from the negligence,

gligence, inattention, and ignorance of tranſcribers! And how many other ſources of *alteration* may be diſcovered! I muſt not diſſemble: can I at this day flatter myſelf, that the *authentic* depoſition of the *witneſſes* has come down to me in its original purity, through the ſpace of ſeventeen centuries, and after having paſſed through ſo many millions of hands, for the moſt part, weak and ignorant?

Having examined this important point of criticiſm, I am ſtruck with the prodigious number of *variations*. I ſee an able critic * has enumerated more than *thirty thouſand*; and yet this critic flatters himſelf, that he has publiſhed the beſt *copy* of the *depoſition* of the *witneſſes*, and declares

* Dr. Mill.

clares, that in executing the work, he accurately *collated* more than *ninety manuſcripts*, collected from all quarters.

I can hardly overcome my aſtoniſhment; but ſuch a ſtate is not favourable for reflection: I muſt put no confidence in thoſe firſt impreſſions, but enquire more attentively and coolly, into the ſources of this prodigious number of *variations*.

Here reflections crowd upon my mind; I ſhall attend to the moſt eſſential. It is true, I know not any *ancient book*, which preſents near ſo great a number of various *readings*, as that now under examination. Ought this, however, to ſurprize

me much? Was there ever any book ſo much read, ſo often copied, tranſlated, and commented upon, in ſo many places, and by ſo many readers, tranſcribers, tranſlators, and interpreters, as this book? It would exhauſt the application of the moſt laborious ſtudent to read and collate the numerous verſions, which have been made of this book, into different languages, and from the earlieſt days of its publication. I have already aſked, would not a book which contains the pledges of *eternal happineſs*, appear to be the moſt important of all books, to that great *ſociety*, to which it had been entruſted, which acknowledged its *authenticity* and *truth*, and which has tranſmitted this precious depoſit from

I am not, therefore, ſo much aſtoniſhed, as I was, at thoſe *thirty thouſand variations*. It naturally happens, that as the copies of a book multiply, the *variations* in that book will be more numerous. And my aſtoniſhment is entirely diſpelled, when turning again to the learned critic, I underſtand from himſelf, that the thirty thouſand *variations* were collected, not from the *copies* of the *original* text only, but alſo from thoſe of all the *verſions*, &c.

I run over thoſe *variations*, and my own eyes convince me, that they do not affect any thing *eſſential*, neither the *foundation* nor *totality* of the *depoſition*. Here I find one word ſubſtituted for another: there one or more words tranſpoſed or omitted:

ted: in another place, ſome more remarkable words, which appear to have paſſed from the *margin* into the *text*, and which I do not obſerve in the moſt original *manuſcripts*.

If, notwithſtanding the great number of *variations* in the writings of Cicero, Horace, or Virgil, the moſt ſevere critics think they are in poſſeſſion of the *authentic* text of thoſe authors; why ſhould not I believe, that I alſo am in poſſeſſion of the *authentic* text of the *depoſition?* If the *variations* of this depoſition were a ſufficient reaſon for my rejection of it, muſt I not in like manner reject all the books of antiquity? If I reaſon juſtly on this ſubject, I muſt conform to the rules of ſound criticiſm, and not pretend to judge of

the book in queſtion, otherwiſe than I do of every other book.

But ought not a book deſigned by Divine Wiſdom to enlighten human reaſon, and to give mankind the moſt poſitive aſſurances of a future ſtate of happineſs, to have been preſerved by that Wiſdom from every ſpecies of *alteration?* And if it had been ſo preſerved, would not this have been the moſt demonſtrative proof, that God himſelf had *ſpoken* by his Meſſenger.

I liſten to the objections without reſerve: truth is the object I purſue: after it alone are my enquiries directed: I am always afraid of taking the ſhadow for the ſubſtance. What then would I deſire at this day?

day? That PROVIDENCE had *miraculously* interposed to preserve from every *alteration* this precious book, which appears to have been abandoned, like all other books, to the dangerous influence of *second causes.*

Have I thoroughly investigated what I would desire? I perceive, in general, the need of an extraordinary interference, to preserve the deposition in its native purity. I would desire, therefore, that God should have *inspired*, or *in an extraordinary manner* directed, all the transcribers, all the translators, and all the booksellers of every age and of every place; or that he had prevented the wars, the conflagrations, the inundations, and in general all the revolutions, which have destroyed

ed the *original writings* of the *witneſſes.*

But would not this *extraordinary* interference have been a *perpetual miracle*, and would a *perpetual miracle* have been really a *miracle?* Would ſuch an intervention have been reconcileable to the œconomy of *Wiſdom?* If natural means could have ſufficed to preſerve in its primitive integrity the whole of this precious depoſition, would it be philoſophical in me, to require a perpetual miracle, in order to prevent ſome words from having been ſubſtituted tranſpoſed, or omitted? As well might I demand a perpetual *miracle*, to prevent each individual from erring in matters of belief, &c.

I bluſh

I bluſh for my objections, and confeſs that my deſire was abſurd. What excuſes it in my own eyes, is, that I conceived it, in the ſimplicity of an honeſt heart, ſincerely enquiring after truth, and had not at firſt perceived it.

SECTION XI.

TRUTH OF THE WRITTEN DEPOSITION.

IF I am ſufficiently convinced of the authenticity of this depoſition, which is the grand object of my enquiries; if I am morally certain, that it has been neither *fabricated*, nor eſſentially *altered*; can I reaſonably doubt of its *truth*? I have already ſaid, that the *truth* of a *hiſtory* is its conformity with the *facts*. If I am ſatisfied, that the miraculous facts contained in the depoſition are of ſuch a nature, that they could have been neither *fabricated*, nor admitted to be *true*, had they been falſe;

falſe; if it likewiſe appeared, that the *witneſſes*, who publicly and unanimouſly atteſted thoſe facts, could neither *deceive* or *be deceived* as to ſuch facts; can I reject their depoſition without counteracting, not merely all the rules of ſound logic, but the moſt commonly received maxims of human conduct?

Here a very ſtriking reflection ſuggeſts itſelf to my mind: though it were poſſible I might conceive ſome reaſonable doubt reſpecting the *authenticity* of the *hiſtorical* writings of the *witneſſes*, and might found thoſe doubts upon this circumſtance, that thoſe writings were not addreſſed to any *particular* ſociety, ſpecially charged to preſerve them; yet I could not reaſonably

form the ſmalleſt doubt reſpecting thoſe *epiſtles*, addreſſed by the *witneſſes* to particular and numerous ſocieties, which they themſelves had founded and governed. How much were thoſe ſocieties intereſted in the careful preſervation of thoſe epiſtles of their own founders! I, therefore, read thoſe epiſtles with all the attention in my power, and I ſee that they every where ſuppoſe the *miraculous* facts, contained in the *hiſtorical* writings, and frequently refer to them as the immoveable baſis of *belief*, and of *doctrine*.

SEC-

SECTION XII.

PROPHECY.

IF the Lawgiver of nature had, *at ſundry times, and in divers manners,* announced the *miſſion* of the Meſſenger, long before the event; this would undoubtedly be a ſtriking proof of the *truth* of that miſſion.

This proof would be ſtill more ſtriking, if by a *particular* diſpenſation of Supreme Wiſdom, the oracles, of which I am ſpeaking, had been conſigned to the very adverſaries of the Meſſenger, and of his miniſters; and if thoſe firſt and moſt obſtinate adverſaries had, until that

time, conſtantly profeſſed to apply thoſe oracles to the Meſſenger, or Meſſiah, who was to come.

I, therefore, open that *book*, which the lineal *deſcendants* of thoſe very men, who crucified the Meſſenger, and perſecuted his miniſters and firſt followers, preſent to me at this day, as *authentic* and *divine*. I run over ſeveral parts of this *book* and meet with a writing* which throws me into the moſt profound aſtoniſhment. I think I am reading an anticipated and circumſtantial hiſtory of the Meſſenger: I diſcover in it all his features, his character, and the principal particulars of his life. In a word, I ſeem to be reading the *depoſition* of the *witneſſes*.

* Iſaiah, ch. liii.

I cannot

I cannot withdraw my eyes from this ſurpriſing picture: what ſtrokes! what colours! what expreſſion! what correſpondence with the *facts*! how juſt, how natural the emblems! What do I ſay! it is not an emblematical picture of far diſtant *futurity*, it is a faithful repreſentation of the *preſent*; and that which is not, is painted as though it were.

" He grew up as a tender plant,
" and as a root out of dry ground;
" he hath no form nor comelineſs;
" and when we ſhall ſee him, there
" is no beauty that we ſhould deſire
" him."

" He is deſpiſed and rejected of
" men: a man of ſorrows, and ac-
" quainted with grief; and we hid

" as it were our faces from him: he
" was deſpiſed, and we eſteemed
" him not."

" He hath borne our griefs, and
" carried our ſorrows.——He was
" wounded for our tranſgreſſions
" and bruiſed for our iniquities: the
" chaſtiſement of our peace was up-
" on him, and by his ſtripes we are
" healed."

——" He opened not his mouth;
" he is brought as a lamb to the
" ſlaughter: and as a ſheep before
" her ſhearers is dumb, ſo he open-
" ed not his mouth."

" He was taken from priſon and
" from judgment; and who ſhall
" declare his generation? for he was
" cut

" cut off out of the land of the liv-
" ing: for the tranſgreſſion of my
" people was he ſtricken"

" He made his grave with the
" wicked, and with the rich in his
" death; becauſe he had done no
" violence, neither was deceit in his
" mouth."

——" When he ſhall have made
" his ſoul an offering for ſin, he
" ſhall ſee his ſeed; he ſhall pro-
" long his days, and the pleaſure of
" the Eternal ſhall proſper in his
" hand."

" Therefore ſhall the Eternal di-
" vide him a portion with the great;
" he ſhall divide the ſpoil with the
" ſtrong; becauſe he hath poured

" out his ſoul unto death: and he
" was numbered with the tranſgreſ-
" ſors; and he bare the ſin of ma-
" ny, and made interceſſion for the
" tranſgreſſors."

Has He, who thus painted the Sun of righteouſneſs, alſo marked out the time of his riſing? I can hardly believe my own eyes, when I read in another *writing** of the ſame book, this amazing oracle, which might be conſidered as a *chronological* hiſtory, compoſed after the *event*.

" Seventy weeks are determined
" upon thy people, and upon thy
" holy city, to finiſh the tranſgreſ-
" ſion, to make an end of ſin, to

* Daniel, ch. ix.

" make

" make reconciliation for iniquity,
" to bring in an everlaſting righte-
" ouſneſs, to ſeal up the viſion and
" prophecy, and to anoint the Moſt
" Holy."

" Know therefore, and under-
" ſtand, that from the going forth
" of the commandment to reſtore
" and build the city, unto the Meſ-
" ſiah the Prince, there ſhall be
" ſeven weeks and threeſcore and
" two weeks."

" And after threeſcore and two
" weeks ſhall the Meſſiah be cut
" off, but not for himſelf."——

" And he ſhall confirm the cove-
" nant with many for one week,
" and in the midſt of the week he

" ſhall cauſe the ſacrifice and the " oblation to ceaſe."

I know that theſe *weeks* in the prophecy are *weeks of years*, each *week* comprehending ſeven years. The event here mentioned was not to take place, therefore, till the end of 490 years.

Hiſtory informs me of the time, when the Meſſiah, announced by the prophecy, came. I go back, therefore, to the 490th year from this Meſſiah; for the *event* muſt be the ſureſt *interpretation* of the *prophecy*.

I thus arrive at the reign of tha Prince, from whom, in fact, the laſ order *iſſued*, for *the reſtoration* of tha nation, then under captivity in hi domi

dominions; and it is from the hand of this very nation, that I receive this prophecy, which betrays and confounds it.

Shall I doubt of the *authenticity* of the *writings*, in which thoſe aſtoniſhing prophecies are contained? But the nation, with which they have always been depoſited, has never *doubted* of it: what can I oppoſe to a teſtimony ſo ancient, ſo conſtant, and ſo uniform? I ſhall not imagine, that this nation has *fabricated* ſuch writings. How abſurd the imagination! Would not the prophecies themſelves contradict it? Would it not alſo be contradicted by many other places of the ſame writings, which load this nation with ignominy, and ſo bitterly reproach it

for its diſorders and crimes? It has, therefore, neither fabricated, nor altered, nor lopped off any part; ſince it has allowed chapters to remain, which are ſo mortifying to itſelf, and ſo favourable to the ſociety which acknowledges the Meſſiah for its Founder.

Shall I have recourſe to the ſtrange ſuppoſition, that the *correſpondency* of the events with the prophecies, is the effect of *chance?* But in the *coincidence* of ſo many different circumſtances, ſhall I diſcover any traces of a *blind* cauſe?

There ariſes in my mind a more reaſonable doubt: can I demonſtrate to my own ſatisfaction, that thoſe prophecies with which I am ſo

ſtruck,

ſtruck, have in reality, for five or ſix centuries, preceded the events which they announce in ſuch preciſe and clear terms? Do I know any contemporary monuments, which atteſt to me, that the authors of the writings in queſtion, lived five or ſix centuries before the Meſſiah? I ſhall not entangle myſelf in this learned and laborious enquiry: I perceive a ſhorter, more eaſy, and more certain route, and which will conduct me to a more deciſive concluſion.

I learn from hiſtory, that theſe *writings* were *tranſlated into Greek*, in the reign of Ptolomy Philadelphus, one of the kings of Egypt. I conſult this famous *verſion*, and find in it the ſame prophecies which preſent

ſent themſelves to me in the *original* text. This verſion which was executed by *ſeventy interpreters* of the ſame nation, into whoſe hands the original text was depoſited, preceded the birth of the Meſſiah about three centuries. I am, therefore, certain, that the prophecies now under my conſideration preceded the *events* which they announce, at leaſt *three centuries*.

There is not the leaſt ground to ſuſpect, that the members of the ſociety founded by the Meſſiah, *foiſted* into this *verſion* thoſe propheeies which were ſo favourable to themſelves. Would not the nation, the guardian of the *original text*, have at once exclaimed againſt ſuch an impoſture? Beſides, muſt they not have

have alſo *foiſted* them into all the writings of the Doctors of that nation? For thoſe Doctors quote theſe very prophecies, and heſitate not to apply them to the Meſſenger who was to come.

If the Author of man, in order to give him a greater number of *proofs* of his *future deſtination*, wiſhed to join to the *language of ſigns*, already ſo perſuaſive, the *prophetical* or *typical language*, He will have given to this language, *characters* equally expreſſive as thoſe he has given to that of *ſigns*. He will have ſo appropriated it to the *future events*, which it was to *repreſent*, that it can be *exactly* or *completely* applied to thoſe *events* only. He will have publiſhed it at ſuch a *time*, and in ſuch *circumſtan-*

ces,

ces, that it was *impoſſible* for the human mind, *naturally* to deduce from that *time*, and thoſe *circumſtances*, the *future* exiſtence of thoſe *events*. And becauſe, if this *language* had been very perſpicuous, men might have oppoſed the birth of the *events*; it will have been intermixed with *ſhades* and *light*: it will have had ſufficient *light* to ſhew, at the birth of the *events*, that the Lawgiver had *ſpoken*; and it will not have had ſo much, as might excite the criminal paſſions of men.

All theſe *characters* I diſcover in the *prophecies* under my eye. In the ſame book I ſee many other *prophecies**, ſcattered up and down, and

* The following Note from Madam Genlis on Religion, printed in Dublin, 12mo. p. 77, contains many of the Prophecies. See Genlis.

and which are ſcarcely leſs ſignificant. " They pierced my hands. " —They parted my garments among

' If one man had written a book of predictions ' relative to Jeſus Chriſt, as to the time and ' manner of his coming, and that Chriſt had ' come conformably to theſe predictions, this ' would have had infinite weight; but there is ' much more in that which has juſt been ſpoken ' of. It is a ſucceſſion of men, who, during four ' thouſand years, conſtantly and without variation come, one after the other, to foretel the ' ſame event. It is a whole people which announces it, and which has exiſted four hundred years, ſtill to bear witneſs of the aſſurances ' which they have of it, and from which they ' cannot be turned aſide by any threats or perſecutions whatſoever; this is quite another conſideration.—

' The time is predicted by the ſtate of the ' Jewiſh people, by the ſtate of the pagans, by ' the ſtate of the temple, and by the number of ' years.

' It

" among them and caſt lots upon " my veſture," &c.

Who,

' It is foretold that the Meſſiah would come ' and form a new alliance, which would cauſe ' the going out of Egypt to be forgotten (Jer. ' xxiii. 7.); that he would eſtabliſh his law, not ' exteriorly, but in the heart (Iſaiah li. 7.); that ' he would " put his law in their inward parts, ' and write in their hearts," (Jer. xxxi. 33. and ' xxxii. 40.)

' The church would be ſmall in the begin- ' ning, but that it would afterwards encreaſe ' (Ezek. xlvii. 1, and following verſes).'

' It is predicted, that idols ſhould then be ' deſtroyed, and images made to ceaſe out of ' Noph; that there ſhould be no more a prince ' of the land of Egypt, and that God would put ' a fear in the land of Egypt (Ezek. xxx. 13).'

' That the temples of the idols ſhould be ' thrown down; and that among all nations, ' and in every place, pure ſacrifices, and to ani- ' mals, ſhould be offered to the Lord. (Mal. i. ' xi.)

That

Who, but He alone, to whom all *ges* are as a *moment*, could unfold to ıan a futurity ſo remote, and *call the*

‘ That God would teach men of his ways (Iſaiah ii. 3. Mich. iv. 2, &c.)

‘ That he would be king of the Jews and the Gentiles (Pſal. ii. 6 and 8. lxxi. 8, &c.)

‘ And no man ever came before or after who taught any thing that approached theſe things.

‘ The Jews, by putting Jeſus Chriſt to death, that they might not receive him for Meſſiah, gave him the laſt mark of a Meſſiah. By continuing to reject him they have made themſelves irreproachable witneſſes; and by crucifying and renouncing him they have accompliſhed the prophecies.

‘ Who would not diſcover Jeſus Chriſt by ſo many particular circumſtances, which have been predicted of him! for it is ſaid,

‘ That he would have a meſſenger ſent before him, (Mal. iii. 1.)

‘ That a child ſhould be born whoſe name ſhould be called Wonderful, Counſellor, The

‘ Mighty

the things which are not, as though they were!

N. B.

'Mighty God, The Everlaſting Father, The 'Prince of Peace (Iſaiah ix. 6.)

'That he ſhould be born in the city of Beth-'lehem (Mich. v. 2.)

'That he ſhould come from the family of 'Judah (Gen. xlix. 8, and the following verſes), 'and of the poſterity of David (2 Kings vii. 12. 'and Iſaiah vii. 13); that he ſhould appear in 'Jeruſalem principally (Mal. iii. 1. Hag. ii. 10).

'That his glory ſhould overcome the wiſe and 'learned (Iſaiah vi. 10); that he ſhould an-'nounce the Goſpel to the poor and meek '(Iſaiah lxi. 1), open the eyes of the blind, un-'ſtop the ears of the deaf, and make the lame 'man leap as a hart (Iſaiah xxxv. 5 and 6); 'that he would bring the blind by a way that 'they knew not, and lead them by paths that 'they had not known; that he would make 'darkneſs light before them (Iſaiah xlii. 16.)

'That he would ſhew the right way (Iſaiah 'xxx. 21), and be a preceptor to the Gentiles '(Iſaiah lv. 4).

'That

N. B. For an account of prophecies in the New Teſtament, and their completion, vid. Beattie's Evidence

'That he would be a victim for the ſins of 'the world; that he would be wounded for 'our tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our iniquities, (Iſaiah liii. 5.)

'That he would be the foundation and precious ſtone of the corner (Iſaiah xxviii. 16.)

'That he would be for a ſtone of ſtumbling, 'and for a rock of offence (Iſaiah viii. 14.)

'That many of the inhabitants of Jeruſalem 'ſhould ſtumble thereon, and fall and be broken '(Iſaiah viii. 15.)

'That the builders ſhould refuſe this ſtone (Pſ. cxvii. 22.)

'That he would make this ſtone which the 'builders refuſed to become the head ſtone of the 'corner.

'And that this ſtone would become a great 'mountain, and fill the whole earth (Dan. ii. 35).

'That therefore it would be rejected (Pſal. 'cxvii. 22), deſpiſed and rejected of men (If.

'liii.

dence of Chriſtianity, chap. II. Sec. II. or Newton on the prophecies.

'liii. 2 and 3), betrayed (Pſ. xl. 10), old (Zech. 'xi. 12), ſmitten, (Iſ. l. 6), mocked (Iſ. xxxiv. 19) afflicted in an infinity of manners (Pſ. lxxvii. '27), ſhould quench his thirſt with gall (Pſ. 'lxviii. 22); that his hands and feet would be 'pierced (Pſ. xxi. 17); that his face would be 'ſpit upon (Iſaiah l. 6); that he would be put 'to death (Dan. ix. 26); that they would caſt 'lots for his garments (Pſ. xxi. 19).

'That he would riſe up from the dead (Pſ. 'xvi. 10).

'On the third day (Hoſ. vi. 2).

'That he would aſcend into heaven (Pſ. xlvi. '6. and lxvii. 19).

'To ſit at the right hand of God (Pſ. cix. 1).

'That kings would arm themſelves againſt 'him (Pſ. ii. 2).

'That being at the right-hand of the Father, 'he would overcome all his enemies (Pſ. cix. 5).

'That the kings of the earth and all the peo-'ple would worſhip him (Pſ. lxxi. 11).'

SEC.

SECTION XIII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FOUNDER.*

IF Divine Wiſdom has really deigned to deſcend upon the earth, to enlighten mortal men, I muſt undoubtedly diſcover, in the *doctrine* of his Meſſenger, the indelible marks of this Adorable Wiſdom.

This grand ſubject demands the moſt profound meditation: I begin by tracing to myſelf the *characters*

* Vid. Beattie's Evidence of Chriſtianity, ch. i. and ch. ii. ſect. 4.

which

which, in my opinion, this doctrine ought to poſſeſs, in order to appear conformable to the moſt pure light of *reaſon*, and to add to that light, what the *wants* of humanity requir-ed, and what that light could not furniſh.

I cannot deny, that *man* is a ſocial being, and that many of his princi-pal *faculties* have the ſtate of *ſociety*, *directly* for their object. The gift of ſpeech alone is ſufficient to convince me of this. The doctrine of a ce-leſtial Meſſenger muſt, therefore, reſt eſſentially upon the great prin-ciples of *ſociability*. It muſt have the moſt direct tendency to perfect and ennoble all the natural ſenti-ments which link man to his fellow-creatures: it muſt multiply and lengthen

lengthen to infinity the cords of *humanity:* it muſt preſent to man, the love of his fellow-creatures, as the moſt abundant and moſt pure ſource of his *preſent* and *future* happineſs. Is there any principle of ſociability more refined, more noble, more active, more faithful, than that exalted benevolence, which, in the doctrine of the Meſſiah, bears the *uncommon and expreſſive name of *charity?* "A new commandment

* I do not ſay *new*, though I might, in a certain ſenſe. Cicero, in his Fifth Book *De Finibus*, has the following beautiful paſſage: In "omni autem honeſto, nihil eſt tam illuſtre, "nec quod latius pateat, quam conjunctio inter "homines hominum, et quaſi quædam ſocietas "et communicatio voluptatum et ipſa *charitas* "*generis humani*," &c. This philoſopher uttered to his own age the firſt accents of *charity*.

" give I unto you, that you love one " another.——By this ſhall all men " know that ye are my diſciples, if " ye have love one to another.*— " Greater love than this hath no " man, than that he lay down his " life for his friends." And who were the friends of the Meſſenger? Men of all ages and of all places: he *died* for the *human race.*

In theſe repeated precepts of brotherly love, in this ſublime law of charity, do I not, ſhall I not, acknowledge the *Founder* and *Lawgiver* of *univerſal ſociety?* In this grand example of beneficence, in this voluntary ſacrifice, ſhall I not

* John, ch. xv.

acknowledge

acknowledge the moſt true and moſt generous FRIEND OF MEN?

The perfection of the heart is always an object of the higheſt concern: the heart is the *univerſal* principle of all the *affections*: a doctrine from heaven would not confine itſelf to the *regulation* of the external actions of *man*: it would alſo carry its happy influences into the moſt ſecret receſſes of the heart. "You have "heard, that it hath been ſaid, Thou "ſhalt not commit adultery; but I "ſay unto you, that whoſoever "looketh upon a woman to luſt af- "ter her, hath committed adultery "already with her in his heart." What, then, is this new doctrine, which condemns the crime *thought of*, as well as the crime *committed?* It is

the doctrine of that ſuperior Philoſopher, who well knew how man was formed, and that ſuch was the conſtitution of his being, that a *movement* too ſtrongly impreſſed upon *certain* parts of the brain, might inſenſibly lead him to *criminal indulgence*. This will be eaſily *comprehended* by the philoſopher. The ſenſeleſs *voluptuary* would at leaſt *feel* it, could he perceive his own heart through the impurities of his imagination. *But, I ſay unto you*; it is the language of a Maſter; and what a Maſter! *He ſpake as one having authority*. The *good man out of the good treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treaſure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil.* How ſimple the expreſſions! how true, how

how admirable the thought! *The good man;*—not the *great man;* it is much better:—*his good treaſure—his heart—the heart of the good man.*

There is no paſſion more inimical to the *ſocial ſpirit* than *revenge.* There is none which more cruelly tyrannizes over the heart, where it has unhappily obtained poſſeſſion. A doctrine from heaven would not, therefore, confine itſelf to the ſimple reprehenſion of a ſentiment ſo dangerous and ſo unworthy of a *ſocial being:* it would not confine itſelf even to demand of him the ſacrifice of his reſentments: far leſs would it allow him to *retaliate:* it would inſpire him with the moſt exalted *heroiſm,* and teach him to puniſh the

offender by acts of kindneſs.* "Ye "have heard that it hath been ſaid, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth "for a tooth; but I ſay unto "you,—Love your enemies, bleſs "them who curſe you, do good "to them who deſpitefully uſe "you and perſecute you.—For if "you love your brethren only, what "do you more than others?" And what *motive* is here propoſed by the Author of a doctrine, ſo well calculated to ennoble the heart of the ſocial being? "That ye may be the "children of your Father who is in "heaven; for he maketh his ſun to "riſe on the evil and on the good, "and ſendeth his rain on the juſt "and on the unjuſt." The truly ſocial being, therefore, does, like Providence,

* Matt. ch. v.

Providence, diſpenſe his favours. He does good to all men; and though he acts upon general principles, the exceptions from thoſe principles are likewiſe *favours*, and the greateſt favours. Judicious in his diſtribution of the goods of Providence, he knows, when neceſſary, how to proportion them to the excellence of the beings to whom he diſtributes them. He inceſſantly advances towards perfection, becauſe he ſerves a MASTER who is *perfect*.—*Be ye perfect*.

A doctrine, which reprobates the very *idea* of *revenge*, and which allows the heart only a choice of favours, will undoubtedly enjoin *reconciliation*, and the pardon of *perſonal* injuries. The truly ſocial being is too great, ever to be inacceſſible to

reconciliation and pardon. * "There-
" fore, if thou bring thy gift to the
" altar, and there remembereſt that
" thy brother hath aught againſt thee,
" leave there thy gift before the al-
" tar, and go thy way, firſt be re-
" conciled to thy brother, and then
" come and offer thy gift." Becauſe the God of *peace*, who is the God of *univerſal* ſociety, deſires the ſacrifices of peace. *To the altar*—it would profane it. *Before the altar*—it will remain there but for a moment. † "How oft ſhall I forgive my bro-
" ther? till ſeven times?" was the queſtion of a diſciple, whoſe ſoul was not yet ſufficiently ennobled. *Until ſeventy times ſeven*, anſwered He, who *always* pardoned, becauſe he had *always* occaſion to pardon.

* Matt. chap. 6.

† Matt. chap. 18.

A doc-

A doctrine which breathed only *charity*, would apparently make *toleration* one of the firſt *laws* of the *ſocial* being: for it would be contrary to the nature of things, that a ſocial being were *intolerant*. Men as yet *carnal*, would diſpoſe of the *fire of heaven:** *Maſter, wilt thou*—— What reply does the Friend of man give to this inhuman raſh demand? "Ye know not what manner of ſpi-"rit ye are of: I am not come to "deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave "them." Shall men, therefore, who call themſelves the diſciples of this good Maſter, perſecute their fellow-men, becauſe they have the misfortune not to affix to certain words the ſame ideas with them-

* Luke, chap. 9.

ſelves? Will they employ fire and ſword to——I cannot proceed—I ſhudder with horror—This dreadful night begins to be diſpelled—A ray of light has penetrated into it—May the Sun of righteouſneſs at laſt drive it from the world!

A doctrine from heaven muſt inſtruct man in the knowledge of thoſe things which conſtitute his *real happineſs*. He is a *ſenſible* being: he has *affections*: he muſt have objects to ſatisfy his *deſires*: he muſthave objects to poſſeſs his *heart*. But what objects would ſuch a doctrine preſent to a being, who lives upon the earth but for a few moments, and whoſe true country is *heaven?* Should this being, whoſe immortal ſoul ſwallows up time, and graſps at eternity, fix his heart upon objects which

time

time can devour? Should this being, endowed with ſo great diſcernment, miſtake the fleeting colours of the dew-drop for the brilliancy of the diamond? * "Lay not up for your-"ſelves treaſures upon earth, where "moth and ruſt do corrupt, and "thieves break through and ſteal; "but lay up for yourſelves treaſures "in heaven, where neither moth "nor ruſt do corrupt, and where "thieves do not break through nor "ſteal: for where your treaſure is, "there your heart will be alſo." What more true, and what more ſenſibly felt by him who has the happineſs to lay up for himſelf ſuch a treaſure! His heart is wholly there. This man has already *ſat down in*

heavenly places. He hungers and thirſts after righteouſneſs, and he ſhall be filled.

If a doctrine from heaven preſcribed any religious worſhip, this would be in direct relation with the nature of the *underſtanding*; and be equally ſuited to the dignity of a moral being, and to the majeſty and ſpirituality of the Supreme Being. "Learn what this means, I will "have mercy, and not ſacrifice." *Mercy*—the thing *ſignified*, and not the *ſign*. * "The hour cometh, and "now is, when the true worſhip-"pers ſhall worſhip the Father in "ſpirit and in truth: for the Father "ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him.

* John, chap. 4.

"God

" God is a ſpirit, and they who " worſhip him, muſt worſhip him " in ſpirit and in truth." *In ſpirit— in truth.*—Theſe two words exhauſt every thing, and are themſelves inexhauſtible: but they may be forgotten: blind *ſuperſtition* never knew them.

But becauſe man is a ſenſible being, and becauſe a religion which would reduce every thing to pure *ſpirituality*, could not be ſufficiently calculated for ſuch a being; a doctrine from heaven would not fail to ſtrike the *ſenſes* by ſomething external. This doctrine would, therefore, eſtabliſh an *external worſhip*; it would inſtitute *ceremonies*; but their number would be ſmall, and their noble *ſimplicity* and *expreſſion* would

would be exactly appropriated to the *particular deſign* of the inſtitution, and to the *ſpirituality* of *internal* worſhip.

In like manner alſo, becauſe it is one of the *natural* effects of *prayer*, to remind man of his weakneſſes, his miſeries, his wants; becauſe it is another *natural* effect of this *religious act*, to imprint on the *brain* thoſe *diſpoſitions* which are moſt proper for overcoming the too ſtrong impreſſions of ſenſible objects; in fine, becauſe *prayer* is an eſſential part of that reaſonable homage, which an *intelligent* creature owes to his CREATOR; a doctrine from heaven would excite man to *prayer*, and make it one of his *duties*. It would even preſcribe him a *form*, and would exhort

exhort him *not to uſe vain repetitions.* And as the mind cannot remain long in that profound recollection which *prayer* requires, the *form* preſcribed would be very ſhort, and contain only the moſt *neceſſary* things, expreſſed in terms very forcible, and *extenſive* in their ſignification.

It would alſo be perfectly in the ſpirit of a doctrine from heaven, to correct the judgments of men reſpecting *moral evil*, the confuſed mixture of the *good* with the *bad*, and reſpecting the *conduct* of PROVIDENCE in general. Here modern philoſophy riſes very high, yet does not attain to the height of this popular philoſophy, which, under familiar images, conceals the moſt tranſcend-

ant truths. * "Sir, didſt not thou "ſow good ſeed in thy field? "Whence then hath it tares? Wilt "thou that we go and gather them "up? Nay, ſaid he, leſt while you "gather up the tares, ye root up "alſo the wheat with them. Let "both grow up until the harveſt; "and in the time of harveſt I ſhall "ſay unto the reapers, gather ye "together firſt the tares, and bind "them in bundles—but gather the "wheat into my barn." Men ignorant of agriculture would anticipate the *ſeaſon*, and clear the field before the *time*. They would not have done ſo, had they been permitted to open the *great book* of the Maſter of the harveſt.

* Matt. chap. 13.

If

If *ſelf-love* be the univerſal principle of man's actions; if he can never be more ſurely directed to what is good, than by the hope of rewards and the fear of puniſhments; if a doctrine from heaven is to ſupport the *morality* of *motives*, which are capable of influencing men of every rank; ſuch a doctrine will unqueſtionably announce to the human race a *future ſtate* of *happineſs*, or of *miſery*, according to the nature of *moral* actions. It will give the moſt magnificent ideas of *future happineſs*, and paint *future miſery* in the moſt frightful colours. And as theſe objects are of ſuch a nature, that they cannot be repreſented to men, but by compariſons taken from things with which they are beſt acquainted; this doctrine will have frequent recourſe

to ſuch compariſons. There will be *banquets, marriages, crowns, fulneſs of joy, rivers of delight*, &c. or there will be *tears, gnaſhing of teeth, darkneſs, the gnawing worm, devouring fire*, &c. In fine, becauſe *threatenings* cannot be too *reſtraining*; ſince it every day happens, that men willingly expoſe themſelves to years of miſery and pain, for the pleaſure of a moment, * it would be perfectly in the ſpirit of this doctrine, to repreſent *puniſhments* as *eternal*, or at leaſt as a *wretchedneſs* of *indefinite* duration. But while it diſcovered this dreadful abyſs to the eyes of *ſenſual* men, this word of life would at the ſame time exalt the compaſſions of the

* M. Bonnet muſt be implicitly followed in his ſentiments here.

common

common FATHER of men, and would permit them to ſee, upon the brink of the abyſs, a beneficent hand, which—if juſtice in the Supreme Being be goodneſs directed by wiſdom—if Sovereign Beneficence eſſentially deſires the perfection of all ſentient and intelligent beings—if *pains* can be a natural means of perfection—if there is more joy in heaven over a ſinner that repenteth—if he loves much, to whom much has been forgiven—my heart bounds—I am loſt in admiration—How marvellous the chain—The compaſſions of Him who alone is good, are infinite—he deſireth not the death of the ſinner, but his converſion and life—He deſireth, and does he deſire in vain?

But would a doctrine, which influenced men by motives of *intereſt*, be a doctrine from heaven? Ought it not, on the contrary, to *direct* men to *goodneſs*, by the *pure* and *diſintereſted* love of goodneſs? A ſoul that loves perfection, may be eaſily ſeduced by a ſublime idea of perfection. Ought I not here to beware of this ſort of illuſion? Would a doctrine, which preſented no other *motive* to men, than a philoſophical conſideration of the *ſatisfaction* attached to the *practice of goodneſs*, be a doctrine ſufficiently *univerſal* and *efficacious?* Would the pleaſure attached to intellectual and moral excellence be felt by every man? Would this delicate, this pure and angelic pleaſure have ſufficient influence in all caſes, and in thoſe principally where

where the paſſions and appetites tyrannize over the ſoul, and ſo powerfully ſolicit it to criminal gratifications? What do I ſay? Is man an angel? Is his body of an *ethereal* ſubſtance? Do not fleſh and blood enter into his compoſition? He who made man, knows what is neceſſary for him, better than the philoſopher too much enamoured of *imaginary* excellence. The Author of all true excellence has appropriated the moſt ſure and moſt efficacious means to the moſt important end. He has ſuited his precepts to the nature and neceſſities of that mixed being, whom he would rouſe and reſtrain. To the ſage he has ſpoken by the voice of wiſdom; to the people by that of feeling and authority. Great and generous ſouls may conform to order

order through their love of order: ſouls of a leſs noble frame may be directed to the ſame end by the hope of reward, or by the fear of puniſhment. In recalling man to moral rectitude, the Author of man does at the ſame time recal him to *reaſon*. He ſays to him, Do good, and thou ſhalt be happy. *Sow, and thou ſhalt reap*, is a faithful expreſſion of the truth, the relation of the cauſe to the effect: a grain thrown into the ground, is there expanded.

If man is by his nature a mixed being; if his ſoul exerciſes all its *faculties* through the intervention of a body; a doctrine which came from heaven would not only inform man of the immortality of the ſoul, it

it would inform him alſo of the* *immortality* of his *being*. And if this doctrine borrowed *compariſons* from what takes place in *plants*, it would ſpeak to the people a familiar, but moſt expreſſive language. "The "hour is coming, in which all that "are in their graves ſhall hear the "voice of the Son of God, and ſhall "come forth, they that have done "good, to the reſurrection of life, "and they that have done evil, to "the reſurrection of damnation." It will not, therefore, be the ſoul alone, which will enjoy this immortality, it will be the *whole man*. *I am the reſurrection and the life*.—Aſtoniſhing words! Language like this, the ear has never heard! The ma-

* Vid. 1ſt Corinthians, chap. 15.

jeſty of the expreſſions announces the Prince of life!—*I am the reſurrection.*—He commands death, and ſtrips the *grave of its victory.*

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SECTION XIV.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE DISCIPLES OF THE FOUNDER.—— PARALLEL BETWEEN THEM, THE DOCTORS OF THE SYNAGOGUE, AND THE SAGES OF PAGANISM.

IF, after having heard Wiſdom itſelf, I liſten to thoſe extraordinary men whom it inſpired, I ſhall think I hear it ſtill, becauſe it will ſtill ſpeak. I ſhall not, therefore, any more put the queſtion to myſelf, how ſimple fiſhermen could have dictated to the human race a ſyſtem of *morality*, far ſuperior to every thing which reaſon had hitherto

conceived; a ſyſtem which comprehends every *duty;* which traces every duty to its true *ſource;* which makes but one family of all the different ſocieties ſcattered upon the face of the earth; which cloſely links together all the members of this family; which unites this family to the great family of heavenly intelligences; and which calls Him, whoſe goodneſs extends from the *ſparrow* to the cherub, the Father of thoſe families. I ſhall eaſily perceive, that ſo exalted a philoſophy ſprung not from the mud of Jordan, and that ſo bright a light did not iſſue from the thick darkneſs of the *ſynagogue.*

I ſhall be more ſtrongly confirmed in this thought, if I have the patience,

tience, or the courage, to peruſe the writings of the moſt famous Doctors of that fanatical and haughty ſynagogue; and if I compare theſe writings with thoſe of the men whom it perſecuted, becauſe their virtues tormented and provoked it. What monſtrous collections of dreams and viſions! What abſurdities heaped upon abſurdities! What abuſe of interpretation! What ſtrange neglect of reaſon! What inſults upon common ſenſe! &c. I attempt to dive into this moraſs; its depth aſtoniſhes me; I dive again, and draw forth a *precious* book, ſo much diſfigured, that I can hardly recognize it.

I afterwards turn to the ſages of paganiſm; I open the immortal

writings of a Plato, a Xenophon, a Cicero, &c. and my eyes are delighted with thoſe firſt appearances of the morning of reaſon. But how weak, how confuſed, how uncertain! What clouds to be penetrated!—Night is hardly ended: day has not yet commenced: the Sun from on high has not yet appeared: but thoſe ſages hope for and expect his riſing.

I cannot refuſe my admiration to thoſe ingenious men. They afforded to human nature, conſolation againſt the outrages which it received from ſuperſtition and barbarity. They were in ſome reſpects the *forerunners* of that reaſon, which was to bring life and immortality to light. I would apply to them, if I durſt, what

what a writer, who was much more than ingenious, ſaid of the prophets; *They were lights ſhining in a dark place.*

But the more I ſtudy thoſe ſages of paganiſm, the more am I ſatiſfied that they had not arrived at that *plenitude* of doctrine, which I diſcover in the works of the *fiſhermen*, and in thoſe of the *tent-maker*. In the ſages of paganiſm, all is not *homogeneous*, all is not equally valuable; and ſometimes I perceive the *pearl upon the dunghill*. They ſay admirable things, which ſeem to reſemble *inſpiration*. But, I know not how it happens, theſe things do not reach the heart, like thoſe which I read in the writings of the men, whom human philoſophy had not

enlightened. In the latter I find a *pathos*, an unction, a gravity, a ſtrength of ſentiment and thought, I had almoſt ſaid, a ſtrength of nerve and muſcle, which I do not find in the former. The latter reach the very vitals of my ſoul; the former addreſs themſelves to my underſtanding. And how much more perſuaſive are the fiſhermen, than the ſages of paganiſm! becauſe they were more ſtrongly perſuaded themſelves: becauſe they had *ſeen*, *heard*, and *felt!*

I diſcover many other circumſtances which appear to me very much to diſtinguiſh the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt from thoſe of Socrates, and eſpecially from thoſe of Zeno. I ſtop to conſider thoſe diſtinguiſh-

ing

ing circumſtances, and the moſt ſtriking are, that compleat neglect of ſelf, which allows the ſoul no other ſentiment, but that of the importance and greatneſs of its object; and to the heart no other deſire, but that of faithfully anſwering its deſtination, and doing good to all men: that *collected* patience which ſupports the trials of life; not only becauſe it is great and philoſophical to ſupport them, but becauſe they are diſpenſations of a wiſe Providence, in whoſe eyes reſignation is the moſt graceful homage: that elevation of thoughts and views, that great courage, which render the ſoul ſuperior to all events, becauſe they render it ſuperior to itſelf: that firm adherence to truth and goodneſs, which nothing can ſhake, becauſe this truth

and goodneſs do not depend upon *opinion*, but are built upon the *demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power:* that juſt valuation of things.—But how far are ſuch men above my feeble panegyric! They have painted themſelves in their writings: in them they wiſh to be contemplated: and what parallel can be drawn between the pupils of Divine wiſdom, and thoſe of human?

SECTION XV.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.—ITS PRINCIPLES AND MANNERS.—TACIT OR EXPRESS CONCESSIONS OF ADVERSARIES.

DID thoſe ſages of Paganiſm, who ſaid ſuch excellent things, and who were ſo much admired by adepts, root out one ſingle prejudice from the minds of the people, or overthrow the ſmalleſt idol? Did Socrates, whom I would call the *inſtitutor* of *natural morality*, and who was the firſt martyr of reaſon in the Pagan world; did the prodigious SOCRATES change the worſhip of

Athens, or effect the ſlighteſt revolution in the manners of his country?

In a ſhort time after the death of JESUS CHRIST, I ſee a ſociety, of which the ſages of Paganiſm had not even conceived the poſſibility, forming itſelf in an obſcure corner of the earth. This ſociety is almoſt entirely compoſed of Socrateſes and Epictetuſes. All its members are cloſely united in the bonds of fraternal love, and of the moſt pure and active benevolence. One ſpirit poſſeſſes them all, the ſpirit of their Founder. They all adore the Supreme Being, *in ſpirit* and *in truth*; and the religion of all conſiſts in * "viſiting the "fatherleſs and widows in their af-

* Epiſtle of James, chap. 1.

"fliction,

" fliction, and in keeping them-
" ſelves unſpotted from the world.
" —They ate their meat with glad-
" neſs and ſingleneſs of heart—they
" * had no poor amongſt them; for
" as many as were poſſeſſors of lands
" and houſes, ſold them, and brought
" the prices to the conductors of
" the ſociety. In a word, I think
" I am contemplating a new *terreſ.*
" *trial paradiſe:* but all its trees are
" *trees of life.*

What, then, is the ſecret cauſe of this great phenomenon in morality? By what prodigy, unknown to all preceding ages, does a ſociety ſpring up, in the boſom of corruption and fanaticiſm, whoſe principle is the love of mankind, whoſe end is their

* Acts, chap. 4.

hap-

happineſs, whoſe motive is the approbation of the SOVEREIGN JUDGE, whoſe *hope* is eternal life?

Do I not deceive myſelf? Might not the firſt hiſtorian of this ſociety have exaggerated its virtues, its manners, its actions? But the men, of whom he ſpeaks, were quickly known in the world, ſurrounded, beſet, obſerved and perſecuted by a crowd of malicious foes: and if adverſity diſcovers the characters of men, I muſt allow, that no men could ever have been better known than theſe were. If, therefore, their hiſtorian had exaggerated, or diſguiſed the facts, is it to be ſuppoſed, that he would not have been attacked by ſuſpicious, vigilant, prejudiced contemporaries, who were not animated by the ſame intereſt?

But

But can I, upon any ſolid grounds, entertain the leaſt ſuſpicion of the teſtimony contained in the famous letter of a magiſtrate *, not leſs intelligent than virtuous, who was particularly charged by a great prince † to watch over the conduct of the new men, who were in all places under the eye of the police? This remarkable teſtimony is the ſubſtance of that which was given to the *new ſociety*, by the very men who had abandoned and betrayed it; which teſtimony was not contradicted by the magiſtrate, who lays it before the prince.

" They declared, that their whole " error, or fault, conſiſted in theſe

* Pliny the Younger.
† Trajan.

" par-

" particulars: that, upon a certain " day, they uſed to aſſemble before " ſun-riſe, and ſing a hymn in praiſe " of Chriſt, as if he had been a " God; that they bound themſelves " by an oath, not to the commiſſion " of any crime, but to abſtain from " theft and adultery, to keep their " promiſes, and not refuſe to reſtore " whatever was committed to their " truſt; that when this was done, " they uſually ſeparated, and met " again to eat in common their " innocent meal."

I ſeem to be ſtill reading the hiſtorian of this extraordinary ſociety. They who gave ſo advantageous a teſtimony to its principles and manners, were at the ſame time certain of the protection of the prince, and

of

of his miniſters, and might have calumniated it with impunity. The magiſtrate does not gainſay this teſtimony; has he, therefore, nothing to oppoſe to it? He, therefore, tacitly acknowledges thoſe principles and manners? "Is it," ſays he, "the "name alone, or the crimes attach-"ed to that name, which ought to "be puniſhed?" He moſt evidently inſinuates, that it was *a name which was puniſhed, rather than crimes.* How ſingular an agreement between two writers, whoſe religious opinions and views were ſo different! How great the monument! how great the eulogium! The magiſtrate is the contemporary of the hiſtorian: they both ſee the ſame objects, and almoſt in the ſame manner. Is it poſſible that the truth ſhould not be here?

But

But the magiſtrate throws a reproach upon this ſociety of *good men:* and what is that reproach? "A *con-* "*tumacious and inflexible obſtinacy,* "*which appeared to him worthy of* "*puniſhment.*" "*I judged it neceſſary,* "adds he, to extort the truth by "force of tortures.—*I have diſcover-* "*ed nothing but a baſe ſuperſtition* "*carried to exceſs.*"

Here the magiſtrate and the hiſtorian differ in their views: *a baſe ſuperſtition:* becauſe the magiſtrate no longer ſaw facts and manners, but a *doctrine;* and in order to be properly ſeen, this doctrine required eyes better exerciſed in obſervations of this kind: nevertheleſs, I pay particular attention to this happy oppoſition between the two writers:

ters: it ſeems to me to concur, like every other circumſtance, in placing the truth in full ſplendor. The magiſtrate does not judge of the new ſociety, like one of its ſecret partiſans, but through all his prejudices of birth, education, philoſophy, politics, religion, &c. I am pleaſed to ſee him mention that *inflexible obſtinacy:* what then was the ſubject of an *obſtinacy* which reſiſted the force of tortures? Was it any particular opinion? No, but facts; and facts of which all the ſenſes could have judged.

SECTION XVI.

THE SUCCESS OF THE TESTIMONY—MARTYRS.

THE infant ſociety daily acquires ſtrength; gradually extends itſelf; and wherever it gains ground, I behold ſuperſtition, prejudice, and idolatry fall down before the croſs of the Founder.

The capital of the world is quickly peopled by the new converts; it overflows with them: they were, ſays Tacitus, a huge multitude. They were ſcattered over the greateſt provinces of the empire: of this I am likewiſe informed by the ſame magiſtrate,

magiſtrate, who was the ornament of his country, and of the age in which he lived. He was governor of two great provinces, Pontus and Bythinia. He writes thus to his maſter: "The matter ſeems to me "worthy of your conſideration, on "account of the multitudes involv- "ed in this danger; for a very "great number of perſons of all "ages, of all ranks, of both ſexes, are, "and will be, every day brought to "trial. The contagion of this ſu- "perſtition has not only infected "the cities, it has reached alſo the "villages and the country.—'Tis "certain, that the temples were "almoſt deſerted, the ſacrifices ne- "glected, and the victims almoſt "without purchaſers*."

* Plin. Epiſt. lib. x. ep. 97.

Corinth,

Corinth, Epheſus, Theſſalonica, Philippi, Coloſſæ, and many other cities, preſent me with a multitude of inhabitants, who embrace the new doctrine. I find the hiſtory of the foundation of thoſe particular ſocieties, not only in the hiſtorian of the great ſociety, of which they formed a part, but alſo in the letters of that indefatigable diſciple, by whom they were founded.

I ſee *oral tradition* unite with the written, and concur in preſerving and ſtrengthening the *teſtimony*. I ſee the diſciples of the ſecond age, joining hands with thoſe of the firſt; an Irenæus receiving from a Polycarp what he had received from one of

of the firſt eye-witneſſes* ; and this chain of traditional teſtimony extends, without interruption, through the following ages, &c.

Kings, and their miniſters, do from time to time inflict upon this innocent ſociety, cruelties unknown to the moſt barbarous nations, and ſhocking to humanity ; and yet in the midſt of theſe horrible perſecutions, the ſociety was founded and increaſed every day.

My

* John. " I could yet repeat," ſays Irenæus, " the diſcourſes which Polycarp delivered to the " people, and what he related of his converſa- " tions with John, and others who had ſeen " the Lord. The account he gave of his per- " ſon, his miracles and doctrine, he received " from eye-witneſſes of the word of life ; and " this account was exactly conformable to our " ſcriptures."

My attention, however, is not ſo much excited by this natural effect of *perſecution*, as by a ſpecies of martyrdom, altogether new. Violent contradictions may irritate and exalt the ſoul: but thoſe millions of martyrs who expire under tortures, are not martyrs of *opinion*; they die voluntarily in atteſtation of *facts*. I know that there have been martyrs of opinion in every age, and in almoſt every place: at this day there are ſome in thoſe countries * over which fooliſh ſuperſtition tyrannizes: but I know of none who have died in atteſtation of facts, except the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt.

" ſcriptures." Euſeb. b. v. ch. 15. and 20. See the notes of Mr. Seigneux on the work of Mr. Addiſon, p. 228, 229. tom. 1.

* India.

I obſerve

I obſerve, alſo, that thoſe men who ſo courageouſly ſacrifice themſelves in ſupport of thoſe facts, are attached to their *creed*, neither by birth, nor education, nor authority, nor any temporal intereſts. Therefore, I can imagine no other ſatisfactory reaſon why they devoted themſelves ſo voluntarily to ſufferings and to death, but the ſtrongeſt conviction of the certainty of the *facts*.

In fine, after three centuries of toils, pains, and tortures, after having combated for three centuries with the armour of patience and charity, the ſociety is triumphant, the new religion aſcends the throne of the Cæſars, idolatry is overthronwn, and paganiſm expires.

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SECTION XVII.

OBSTACLES TO BE SURMOUNTED.

WHAT an aſtoniſhing revolution have I been contemplating! Who were the men who brought it about? What obſtacles had they to ſurmount?

A poor man, who had not where to lay his head, who was reputed the ſon of a carpenter, and who ended his days by an ignominious death, was the Founder of this Religion, which triumphs over Paganiſm and its monſters.

This

This man choſe diſciples from the dregs of the people: he took the greateſt part of them from among ſimple fiſhermen, and to ſuch men he gave commiſſion to publiſh his religion throughout the earth: *Go and teach all nations.——Ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me to the uttermoſt parts of the earth.*

They obey the voice of their Maſter; they publiſh to the nations the *word of life;* they atteſt the reſurrection of the crucified Jeſus; the nations believe, and are converted.

Here is the great *phenomenon in morality* which I have to explain: here is a revolution more ſurprizing than any recorded in hiſtory, and

for which I muſt aſſign a ſatisfactory and *ſufficient reaſon.*

I take a ſurvey of the earth before this great *revolution* happened. Two principal religions preſent themſelves to my view, *theiſm* and *polytheiſm.*

I do not mean the *theiſm* of the pagan philoſophers, that inconſiderable number of ſages, who like Socrates or Anaxagoras, aſcribed the origin of things to an *Eternal Spirit;* theſe ſages did not form any *body,* and abandoned the people to the mire of prejudice and idolatry. They had their hands full of truth, and deigned to open them to thoſe only who were *adepts.*

I mean

I mean the *theiſm* of that ſingular and populous nation, ſeparated by its laws, its cuſtoms, and even its prejudices, from all other nations, and which believed it had received its religion and laws from the immediate hand of God. This nation is firmly perſuaded, that this religion and theſe laws were ſupported by divers extraordinary miracles; it is ſtrongly attached to its *external worſhip*, its cuſtoms, and its *traditions*; and though it is very much ſtripped of its priſtine ſplendour, and ſubjected to a foreign yoke, it ſtill preſerves all the pride of its ancient liberty, and thinks itſelf the ſole object of the CREATOR's favour: it has the moſt ſovereign contempt for all other nations, and profeſſes to

expect a Deliverer, who will ſubject the univerſe to its ſway.

Polytheiſm is almoſt the univerſal and reigning religion. It aſſumes all kinds of forms, according to the climate and genius of the nations. It favours all the paſſions, even the moſt monſtrous. It abandons the heart, but ſometimes reſtrains the hand. It flatters all the ſenſes, and unites the *fleſh with the ſpirit.* It preſents to the people the famous examples of its gods, and thoſe gods are monſters of cruelty and impurity, who muſt be honoured by *cruelties* and *impurities.* It attracts the eyes of the multitude by its enchantments, its prodigies, its auguries, its divinations, the pomp of its worſhip, &c. It builds the altar

of

of vice, and digs the grave of virtue.

How will the fiſhermen, tranſformed into *miſſionaries*, perſuade ſuch theiſts as thoſe, that all their external worſhip, which is ſo majeſtic, ſo ancient, ſo venerable, is no longer that which God requires of them, and that it is for ever aboliſhed; that all thoſe auguſt, myſterious ceremonies, ſo well ſuited to aſtoniſh the ſenſes, are only *ſhadows* of thoſe things, of which they preſent to them the ſubſtance? How will they force them to acknowledge, that thoſe traditions, to which they were ſo attached in heart and ſpirit, are only the *commandments* of *men*, and that they annihilate that law, which they believe to be di-

vine? How, in particular, will the fiſhermen perſuade thoſe proud theiſts, that the poor and humble man, whom their magiſtrates condemned, and who expired upon a croſs, is indeed that great Deliverer who had been announced to them, and whom they expected? that they are no longer the ſole objects of the *extraordinary* favour of Providence, and that all the nations of the earth are called to participate of this favour?

How will fiſhermen remove from the eyes of the groſs *polytheiſt*, thoſe *multiplying glaſſes*, which make him ſee as many gods as there are objects in nature? How will they ſpiritualize his ideas, detach him from that inert matter in which he is incorporated, and convert him to the LIV-

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ING GOD? How will they draw him from the ſeducing pleaſures of ſenſe, from voluptuouſneſs of every kind? How will they purify and ennoble all his affections? How will they make him a ſage, and more than a ſage? How will they reſtrain his heart as well as his hand? How, in particular, will they perſuade him to do homage to a man diſgraced by an ignominious death; and convert the *fooliſhneſs of the croſs into wiſdom*, in the eyes of the polytheiſt?

How will the heralds of the *crucified* Jeſus induce their new followers to renounce their deareſt temporal intereſts, to live in contempt, in humiliation, in opprobrium; to brave all pains and puniſhments, to reſiſt all temptations, and to perſe-

vere unto death in a doctrine, which promiſes no recompence in the preſent, but in a future life?

By what *means*, therefore, does it happen, that the poor fiſhers are become *fiſhers of men?* How was it poſſible, that in leſs than half a century, ſo many different nations ſhould embrace the new doctrine? How *has the grain of muſtard-ſeed become a great tree?* How has this tree overſhadowed ſo many great kingdoms?

I know that men in general are not enemies to ſeverity of morals: becauſe it ſuppoſes very great efforts: becauſe men have a natural taſte for excellence: not that they always aim to attain it; but they are always pleaſed with it, at leaſt in

in ſpeculation. Voluntary poverty, great diſintereſtedneſs, a painful, laborious life, eaſily attract the attention and eſteem of men. All theſe they will readily admire, provided they are not obliged to practiſe them.

If, therefore, this new doctrine were purely *ſpeculative*, I can without much difficulty conceive, that it might have gained the eſteem, and even admiration of ſome nations. They might have regarded it as a new ſyſtem of philoſophy; and its profeſſors might have appeared to them ſages of a very particular order. But this doctrine conſiſts not of pure *ſpeculations;* it is wholly *practical;* it is ſo *eſſentially*, and in the ſtricteſt ſenſe: it is the moſt ex-

alted kind of *practical heroiſm:* it ſuppoſes the moſt complete ſelf-denial; combats all the paſſions; captivates all the inclinations; repreſſes all the deſires; allows the heart no other indulgence, but the love of God, and of its neighbour; demands continual ſacrifices, and thoſe of the greateſt extent; and never propoſes any rewards which the eye can ſee, or the hand can touch.

I conceive alſo, that the charms of eloquence, the glare of riches, the ſplendor of dignified rank, the influence of power, will eaſily procure credit to a doctrine, and gain it many partiſans.

But the doctrine of the crucified Jeſus is announced by poor ſimple men,

men, whoſe eloquence conſiſts rather in things than in words; by men who publiſh things which ſhock all received opinions; by men of the loweſt rank, and who promiſe to their followers nothing in this life, but ſufferings, torments, and *croſſes*. And yet theſe are the men who triumph *over fleſh and blood*, and convert the world.

The *effect* is prodigious, rapid, durable; it ſtill exiſts: I diſcover no natural cauſe capable of producing it: it muſt, nevertheleſs, have a *cauſe*, and a great cauſe: what, then, is that *cauſe? At the name of Jeſus, the lame walk, the lepers are cleanſed, the deaf hear, the blind ſee, the dead are raiſed.* I enquire no farther: the whole is explained: the problem is ſolved.

ſolved. The Lawgiver of nature has ſpoken: the nations have heard him, and the univerſe has acknowledged its Maſter. He who in the grain of muſtard-ſeed ſaw the great tree, was therefore the meſſenger of this Maſter, who *choſe the weak things of the world to confound the ſtrong.*

SECTION XVIII.

GENERAL DIFFICULTIES.——THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL HAS NOT EXTENDED SO FAR AS THE GREATNESS OF ITS DESIGN SEEMED TO REQUIRE.—THE GREATER NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS HAVE MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN VIRTUE.—ANSWERS.

BUT am I not precipitate in my judgment? Am I not too much diſpoſed to believe and admire? Has the univerſe acknowledged its Maſter? Has this ſalutary doctrine converted the whole world? I caſt my eye upon the globe, and ſee with aſto-

aſtoniſhment that this heavenly light illuminates but a ſmall part of the earth, and that all the reſt is covered with thick darkneſs. And even in the illuminated parts, how many ſpots!

This difficulty does not appear to me very conſiderable. If this doctrine of life is to endure as long as the *preſent ſtate* of our globe, what relation do ſeventeen centuries bear to its *total* duration? Perhaps that of ſeventeen days, perhaps ſeventeen hours, perhaps leſs. Shall I judge of the duration of this religion, as I judge of the duration of empires? Every empire is like graſs, and all the glory of empires is as the flower of the field. The graſs withereth, the

the flower fadeth, but the religion of the Lord endureth: it will ſurvive all empires: its head is to reign till God has put all his enemies under his feet. The laſt enemy that will be deſtroyed is death.

I examine the difficulty more cloſely, and perceive, that it amounts preciſely to that which may be raiſed from the unequal diſtribution of the gifts and advantages of mind and body. This ſecond difficulty, when thoroughly weighed, will lead me into a palpable abſurdity. The gifts of the mind, as well as thoſe of the body, depend upon a train of phyſical circumſtances connected with one another, and this chain mounts up to the firſt inſtant

inſtant of creation. That all men, therefore, ſhould have poſſeſſed the ſame gifts, and in the ſame degree, it would have been neceſſary, in the firſt place, that they had not been deſcended from one another. It would have been neceſſary, in the ſecond place, that all men had been born in the ſame climate, and been nouriſhed by the ſame food; that they had enjoyed the ſame kind of life, the ſame education, the ſame government, &c. For can I deny, that all theſe things have more or leſs influence upon the mind? Here the moſt ſlight cauſe carries its influence much farther than I can imagine. Of this I am ſufficiently convinced.

So

So that, in order to produce this perfect equality of gifts among all the individuals of the human race, it would have been neceſſary, that all thoſe individuals ſhould have been caſt in the ſame mould; that the earth every where ſhould have poſſeſſed the ſame degree of light and of heat; that its productions ſhould have been every where the ſame; that there ſhould have been neither mountains nor vallies, &c. But I ſhould never finiſh, were I to exhauſt this ſubject.

How many ſuch difficulties will at firſt ſtrike a man of any penetration, and from which he might ſee a multitude of abſurdities ariſe, were he capable of analyzing them! The mind

mind willingly dwells upon the ſurface of things; it does not chuſe to penetrate them, becauſe it dreads labour and difficulty. Sometimes it has greater dread of the—*truth*.

If, therefore, it was inconſiſtent with the *ſtate of things*, that all men ſhould partake of the ſame gifts, and of the ſame meaſure of thoſe gifts; why ſhould I be aſtoniſhed that they have not the ſame belief? How much is this belief itſelf linked with *phyſical* and *moral* circumſtances!

But is this holy religion, which appears to me ſo limited in its progreſs, and by which a benevolent heart would deſire, that the whole world were enlightened, to remain for

for ever within its preſent limits? How many different means may not Providence have in reſerve, to enable it one day to ſurmount with ſplendor thoſe narrow limits to which it is now confined? What precious monuments, what demonſtrative proofs, ſtill buried in the boſom of the earth, or under ruins, may He not draw thence, at the time marked by his wiſdom! What future revolutions, in the great political bodies, now in poſſeſſion of our globe, may not be fore-ordained as to time and manner, in the deſigns of Supreme Goodneſs! May not that nation, which is the moſt ancient and moſt ſingular of all nations; which is diſperſed, and as it were *planted*, for ſeventeen centuries,

in

in the midſt of the nations, without ever being incorporated with them, without ever forming one *diſtinct* nation of itſelf; which is the faithful depoſitary of the moſt ancient oracles, the perpetual and living monument of the truth of the new oracles; may not this nation, I ſay, be one day, in the hand of Providence, one of the great inſtruments of his deſigns, in favour of that religion, which it does not yet acknowledge?

If the doctrine does not produce greater m*oral* effects among moſt of thoſe who profeſs it, ſhall I aſcribe this to its imperfection, or want of *ſufficient* motives? But do I know any ſyſtem of doctrine, whoſe principles

ples tend more directly to the happineſs of *univerſal* ſociety, and of each individual member? Is there any, which preſents motives better calculated to influence the judgment and the heart? It exalts mortal man to the throne of GOD, and extends his hopes to eternity.

But in promulgating this ſublime law, the Lawgiver of nature has not transformed into mere *machines* the intelligent beings to whom he gave it. He has left them the *phyſical* power of obſerving or of violating it. He has thus put into their own hands the deciſion of their lot. He has ſet before their eyes good and evil, happineſs and miſery.

To object againſt the doctrine of the Founder, becauſe all its profeſſors are not *ſaints*, is to object againſt philoſophy, becauſe all who profeſs it are not *philoſophers*. Is it therefore true, that philoſophy is not qualified to make philoſophers? Shall I judge of any doctrine by its effects alone? Will it not be more equitable to judge of it by its principles, its maxims, its motives, and by the fitneſs of all theſe to produce *the end* propoſed? If, notwithſtanding the excellence of this doctrine, and its fitneſs to produce the end propoſed by it, I am forced to acknowledge, that it does not always ſucceed, I can from this conclude only, that the prejudices, paſſions, and tempers of men frequently weaken

weaken or deſtroy the impreſſion which this doctrine would naturally make upon the ſoul. This does not at all ſurprize me; becauſe I eaſily conceive, that an intelligent and free being cannot be *conſtrained* by *motives*, and that *reaſons* and *arguments* are not *compulſory* cauſes. It is very obſervable alſo, that all the men who make external profeſſion of a doctrine are not inwardly convinced of its truth.

And if, upon the whole, I am convinced, that the number of real ſages, whom any doctrine can form, is very ſmall, I ought not to be aſtoniſhed at this, becauſe I perceive, that great excellence, in no profeſſion whatever, can at any time be very general; and that it muſt be

leſs

leſs ſo, in the profeſſion of virtue, than in any other. But is not virtue, though leſs perfect, ſtill virtue? Is not gold, though mixed with other matter, ſtill gold? If I would be always juſt, ſhould I not eſtimate this doctrine by the good it has produced, however ſmall that may be, and by all the evils which it has prevented? And above all if the doctrine in queſtion preſcribed the ſilent performance of good works, of *good*, rather than of *ſplendid* works; if it required, that the left hand ſhould not know what the right hand did; I ſhould therefore infer, that it was impoſſible to calculate all the advantages which ſociety could derive from ſuch a doctrine.

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SECTION XIX.

THE PROOFS OF CHRISTIANITY ARE NOT SUITED TO THE CAPACITY OF ALL MEN.——ANSWER.

ANOTHER difficulty demands examination: Ought not a doctrine, which was to be announced to all nations of the earth; which was to give to the whole human race aſſurances of *immortality*; which proceeded from Wiſdom itſelf; ought not this doctrine to have been founded upon proofs, which all men, of all times and of all places, could have apprehended with equal eaſe, and againſt which no *reaſonable* objection

jection could be raiſed? At the ſame time, how much knowledge is requiſite to collect, to underſtand, and to eſtimate thoſe proofs! How many profound, laborious, and intricate enquiries, does not this knowledge preſuppoſe! How few purſue it with ſucceſs! What talents, what ſagacity, what diſcernment are required, in comparing the proofs, in eſtimating the degree of probability in each, in judging of the whole of the probabilities united together, in balancing the proofs and objections, in determining the force of the objections in each kind of proof, in refuting thoſe objections, and in drawing from the whole, concluſions which produce certainty! Would a doctrine, which ſuppoſed ſo many extraordinary qualities of the underſtanding

ſtanding and of the heart, ſo much knowledge, ſo many enquiries, be at all adapted to every individual of the human race? Would it be properly calculated to afford men reaſonable aſſurances of future happineſs? Could it diſpel their doubts, ſtrengthen and augment the hopes of reaſon, bring life and immortality to light?

I diſguiſe not this difficulty: I do not endeavour to enfeeble it: I preſent it to myſelf in its full force: perhaps it is not unanſwerable. Of this I wiſh to be certain. I, therefore, examine it more attentively, and analyze it, if poſſible.

I acknowledge that man, by the light of reaſon alone, could not at-

tain to the certainty of a future ſtate. He could, therefore, be conducted to this certainty by *extraordinary* means only. I can eaſily conceive, that the acquiſition of new faculties, or perhaps a great degree of perfection in his preſent faculties alone, might have brought this ſtate of futurity within the reach of his *intuitive* knowledge, and enabled him to contemplate it in ſome reſpects as he does his preſent exiſtence. I conceive, likewiſe, that an internal revelation, or external miracles, could have given to man that certainty ſo neceſſary to his happineſs, and thereby ſupplied the imperfection of his preſent faculties.

But the acquiſition of new faculties, or a great degree of perfection in

in the preſent, would have rendered man a being very different from that known under the denomination, *man*. And as all the parts of our world are in harmony, and in ſtrict relation with each other, and with the whole ſyſtem, it is evident, that if man, the principal being of our planet, had been changed, he would have been no longer in relation with this planet, in which he was to paſs the firſt moments of his exiſtence. An eye much more penetrating, the touch incomparably more delicate, &c. would have expoſed him to continual torture. It would have been neceſſary, therefore, to have changed the œconomy of the planet itſelf, to bring it into relation with the new œconomy of man.

I perceive now, that the difficulty, conſidered in this point of view, amounts to this: Why has not God made another earth? Why has he not created another univerſe? For the earth is joined to the univerſe, as man is to the earth. There is no ſingle part of the ſyſtem, which has not its reaſon in the whole. Can I pretend to ſay, that, in the work of Supreme Intelligence, there is any thing whatever, *unconnected* with that work, and at the ſame time making a *part* of it? If, notwithſtanding the extreme weakneſs of my talents, and defectiveneſs of my knowledge; if, notwithſtanding the great imperfection of my organs, I fail not to diſcover ſo many connections, ſo many relations, ſo much harmony between the different parts of the world

which

which I inhabit; if theſe connections multiply, combine, and diverſify, in proportion as I multiply, combine, and diverſify my obſervations and experiments; is it not extremely probable, that, if my faculties and inſtruments were incomparably more perfect, I ſhould diſcover the ſame connections, the ſame relations, the ſame harmony every where, even in the minuteſt particles? And this muſt be the caſe, ſince the greater are always compoſed of ſmaller parts, and theſe again of ſtill ſmaller, &c. and ſince every whole muſt eſſentially depend upon the order and harmony of its parts.

It would, therefore, be very unphiloſophical to wiſh, that the Author of the univerſe had changed the

œconomy of man, to afford him greater certainty of his future ſtate. Nor would it be leſs ſo, to wiſh, that ſuch aſſurances had been afforded to him by an *internal* revelation. For this revelation muſt have been univerſal, or extended to every individual of the human race: ſince the certainty of a future happineſs would be equally neceſſary to all. But as it is agreeable to the œconomy of man, to be conducted by his *ſenſes*, and by *reflection:* would an internal and univerſal revelation, perpetuated from age to age, bear any relation to the preſent conſtitution of man? And if the happineſs he is to enjoy in a future ſtate, be connected with the application he made of his reaſon, in his enquiries into the foundations of that happineſs;

neſs; how could he have applied his reaſon to this noble enquiry, when an internal and irreſiſtible revelation had rendered this exerciſe of the underſtanding uſeleſs?

There remained one other *extraordinary* way by which man could be conducted to this deſirable certainty, which reaſon alone could not give. This was by miracles, palpable, numerous, and diverſe, chained to each other, and indiſſolubly linked with circumſtances to characterize them, and to determine their *end*. This was evidently the only way known to us, which makes no change in the conſtitution of man, and leaves him the free exerciſe of all his faculties.

But if miracles were deſigned to manifeſt to man the will of the Supreme Being; if they were, in ſome reſpects, the phyſical expreſſion of this will, all men have an equal right to this extraordinary favour, and might aſpire to the ſight of miracles; and if, in order to ſatisfy the wants or deſires of each individual of the human race, miracles had been univerſal or perpetual, how could they have preſerved their quality of *extraordinary ſigns?* How could they have been diſtinguiſhed from the *ordinary* courſe of nature?

It was, therefore, agreeable to the very nature of miracles, that they ſhould be performed in a certain *place*, and in a certain *time*. Now this relation to place and time, this neceſ-

neceſſary relation, evidently ſuppoſes *teſtimony*, or oral and written tradition. Tradition itſelf ſuppoſes a certain language, underſtood by them to whom it might be tranſmitted. This language could not be univerſal, perpetual, unalterable; ſuch a language would no more ſuit the œconomy of our planet, than a perfect reſemblance, either phyſical or moral, in all the individuals of the human race.

So that it was a natural conſequence of the viciſſitude of all human things, that the language in which the witneſſes of the miraculous facts have publiſhed their *depoſition*, ſhould become a dead language, and be underſtood only by the learned. It was alſo a conſequence

quence of the viciſſitude of things in this lower world, that the *originals* of the depoſition ſhould be loſt, that the firſt *copies* of thoſe originals ſhould likewiſe be loſt; that the latter copies ſhould exhibit a great number of *variations*; that a multitude of minute facts, and minute circumſtances, very well known to contemporaries, and proper to throw light upon certain paſſages of the text, ſhould be unknown to their deſcendants; that many other circumſtances, more or leſs uſeful, ſhould alſo be unknown to them, &c. &c. It was, in fine, a natural conſequence of the ſtate of things, and of the nature of the faculties of man, that an *art* ſhould be invented, which had for its direct object, the interpretation of the moſt important

portant of all books This admirable art was, therefore, to come into being; it was to enlighten the wiſe, to diſſipate or brighten the clouds which obſcured certain truths, and the wiſe were to enlighten and guide the people.

I ſhall not return to the objection, that God could, by an extraordinary interpoſition, have prevented the decay of the language in which the depoſition had been written; that He could, by the ſame method, have prevented the deſtruction of the originals of the depoſition; the contrarieties, alterations, and variations of the text. I have ſeen how unreaſonable ſuch an objection would be, ſince it would ſuppoſe a continuation of miracles, &c. I have alſo acknow-

knowledged, that thoſe contrarieties, alterations, and variations of the text, do not affect the foundation or ſum of the depoſition, and that it is not impoſſible to reconcile thoſe texts in a ſatisfactory manner.

I ſhall examine this difficulty ſtill more cloſely. As the certainty of a future ſtate could be founded upon *real* proofs only, and as the nature and end of miracles required, that they ſhould be performed in a certain place, and in a certain time, it muſt therefore follow, that the proofs of a future ſtate muſt, like all other proofs, be ſubmitted to the examination of reaſon. The proofs of a future ſtate muſt, therefore, be as much under the juriſdiction of criticiſm,

ticiſm, as any other hiſtorical facts. And they would thus become the moſt important object of the enquiries of the learned; and it might enter into the plan of PROVIDENCE, that the learned ſhould collect thoſe proofs, arrange them in a certain order, unfold them, reſcue them from obſcurity, reſolve the objections which they might create, compoſe particular treatiſes on all theſe ſubjects, and be, to the people, interpreters of that depoſition in which were contained the words of eternal life.

I wiſh to compreſs my arguments. Man has two ways of obtaining knowledge: the *ſenſes*, and *reflection*. Neither of theſe ways, nor both united, can lead him to a *moral certainty*

ty of his future exiſtence; there is too great a diſproportion between them, and the nature of the things which are the objects of this *certainty*. Man, therefore, could not be directed to this certainty, by any other than an extraordinary method; but this direction was to be given to a certain intelligent and moral being, to a man, that is to ſay, to a *mixed being*, endowed with certain faculties, and whoſe faculties are confined to certain limits. If, then, this extraordinary method conſiſted in giving man new faculties, or in changing the preſent power of his faculties; it would not have been *man* that would have been directed to this certainty; it would have been a being very different from man. It was therefore neceſ-

ſary,

ſary, that this *extraordinary* method ſhould bear ſuch a relation to the preſent conſtitution of man, that without producing any change therein, it might ſufficiently convince his reaſon of the certainty of a future ſtate. Miracles were this method; for nothing was more proper to prove to man, that the Lord of nature *had ſpoken.* But if miracles had been wrought in every place, and at every time, they would have returned again into the *ordinary* courſe of nature; and it would be no longer poſſible to aſcertain, whether the Lord of nature had ſpoken. Miracles, therefore, muſt have been wrought in a *certain place*, and at a *certain time.* They muſt, therefore, like all other facts, be ſubjected to the rules of *teſtimony.* Reaſon muſt

apply

apply thoſe rules, and by this application, judge of the reality of thoſe facts. And becauſe thoſe facts were miraculous, (and miraculous facts demand a greater number of teſtimonies, and teſtimonies of greater weight, in order to be believed,) it was requiſite, that this kind of proof ſhould be given by *witneſſes*, who in the higheſt degree conjoined the *conditions*, which in the eyes of reaſon eſtabliſh the *credibility* of any fact whatſoever. I ſay, *of any fact whatſoever*, becauſe it appears to me moſt evident, that miracles are not leſs facts, though they ſhould not be comprehended within the ſphere of the common or ordinary laws of nature. Reaſon will then acquieſce in the proofs which miracles afford, if upon applying to them the

the rules of ſound criticiſm and ſtrict logic, they appear to be ſolidly eſtabliſhed.

I ſhall add only one reflection more, and then I think I ſhall have ſatisfied myſelf as to the difficulty propoſed in the beginning of the ſection. Have I not very much exaggerated this difficulty? Are great talents, ſuch various and exalted knowledge, indeed neceſſary to form a ſound judgment of the proofs of this revelation, which the wants of human nature ſolicit from Supreme Goodneſs? Will not a good underſtanding, which is impartial, and diſengaged from the prejudices of falſe philoſophy; will not a good and honeſt heart, a moderate degree of attention, be ſufficient to eſ-

timate palpable proofs, collected by men of the beſt qualifications, with order and perſpicuity, in books which are ſuited to the capacities of all the world? That a judicious reader may be able to judge of the truth of a particular hiſtory, or of a particular doctrine, is it abſolutely neceſſary, that he poſſeſs all the talents and knowledge of the authors, who have collected the proofs of that hiſtory or doctrine? Does the deciſion of any point whatever, indiſpenſibly demand, that all the judges have the ſame meaſure of knowledge, the ſame penetration, the ſame talents, which they have who report it? Does it not happen every day, that we are obliged to have recourſe to the ſkilful, or to teachers of arts and ſciences, upon very many

many things more or leſs neceſſary? Why then ſhould not the people have recourſe to the learned, to ſelect and eſtimate the proofs of that revelation, whoſe certainty they endeavour to place within their reach? Beſides, are there not ſome of thoſe proofs which may be eaſily apprehended by the moſt limited underſtandings? How ſtrongly does the excellency of the morality of JESUS CHRIST ſtrike the honeſt, feeling ſoul! How much does the character of CHRIST himſelf excite the admiration and reverence of every ſincere friend to truth and virtue! How deeply is this character ſtamped upon the firſt diſciples! What lives! what manners! what examples! what benevolence! what charity! Could the people behold ſuch things, and remain unconcerned?

concerned? They do not, perhaps, believe from ſuch proofs, as will convince a man of learning; but they may believe from proofs moſt adapted to their capacity; and their belief will not be leſs rational, leſs conſolatory, nor leſs practical.

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SECTION XX.

A DIFFICULTY ARISING FROM HUMAN LIBERTY—ANSWERED.

SHALL I oppoſe the *moral* neceſſity of human actions againſt the doctrine of the Founder of Chriſtianity? Shall I pretend, that this kind of neceſſity excludes all *imputation*, and conſequently all law and religion? Do I not clearly ſee, that moral neceſſity is, in fact, no *real neceſſity*? That it is nothing more, than *certainty*, conſidered in actions which are *free*? Becauſe a man muſt

muſt love himſelf; becauſe he cannot but determine for that which his underſtanding has judged to be moſt eligible; becauſe his will tends eſſentially to a real or apparent good, does it follow that man is purely a machine? Does it follow, that laws cannot direct him to his true end? that he cannot obſerve them, that he has no underſtanding, no will, no liberty; that his actions cannot, in any ſenſe, be imputed to him; that he is not ſuſceptible of happineſs or of miſery; that he cannot ſearch for the one, nor avoid the other; that, in a word, he is not a *moral* being? I lament, that the poverty of language has introduced into philoſophy that unfortunate term *moral neceſſity*, ſo improper in itſelf, and

ıd which creates ſo much confuſion a thing moſt ſimple, which can-ıt be explained with too much pre-ſion and clearneſs.

SECTION XXI.

CHRISTIANITY UNFAVOURABLE TO PATRIOTISM.*——HAS PRODUCED GREAT EVILS UPON THE EARTH—ANSWERS.

SHALL I object to the doctrine of JESUS CHRIST, that it is not favourable to *patriotiſm*, but *calculated to make men ſlaves?* Would not the hiſtory of its progreſs and eſtabliſhment immediately contradict me? Were there ever any ſubjects more loyal, any citizens more virtu-

* Vid. Beattie's Evidences of Chriſtianity, ch. iii. ſect. v.

ous, any ſouls more generous, any ſoldiers more intrepid, than thoſe new men, ſcattered throughout the ſtate, every where perſecuted, always humane, always beneficent, always faithful to the prince, and to his miniſters? If the lively and profound ſentiment of the nobleneſs of our being is the true ſource of greatneſs of ſoul, what will not be his greatneſs of ſoul, and elevation of thought, whoſe views are not bounded by the limits of time?

Shall I repeat, that true diſciples of JESUS would not form a ſtate which could ſubſiſt? "Why not," anſwers a ſage*, who knew how to eſtimate things, and who cannot be

* Monteſquieu's Spirit of Laws, book xxiv. ch. 6.

ſuſpected either of credulity or partiality; "Why not?" They would be citizens well informed of their duties, and who poſſeſſed great zeal to perform them; they would be very ſenſible of the rights of natural defence; the more they believed they owed to religion, the more they would think they owed to their country. "The principles of this "religion being deeply engraven "upon the heart, would be infinitely "more ſtrong than the falſe honour "of monarchies, the human virtue "of republics, and the ſervile fear "of deſpotic ſtates."

Shall I take pleaſure in exaggerating the evils which this doctrine has occaſioned in the world; the civil wars it has produced; the blood

blood it has ſhed; the atrocious acts of injuſtice it has committed; and the calamities of every kind which accompanied it in the firſt ages, and which were renewed in ages much later, &c.? But ſhall I for ever confound the abuſe, or the accidental, and perhaps neceſſary conſequences of an excellent thing, with that thing itſelf? What! could a doctrine which breathed nothing but mildneſs, charity, and mercy, create thoſe horrid evils? Could ſo pure, ſo holy a doctrine, dictate thoſe crimes? Could the word of the Prince of life arm brother againſt brother, and teach them the infernal art of improving every kind of puniſhment? Could toleration itſelf ſharpen the poignard, prepare the torture, erect the ſcaf-

fold, and kindle the pile? No, I ſhall not confound darkneſs with light, furious fanaticiſm with amiable charity. I know that * "charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; "that it envieth not, vaunteth not "itſelf, is not puffed up; that it "doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, "ſeeketh not its own, is not eaſily "provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in juſtice, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all "things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." No, He who went about doing good, placed not the murderous ſword in the hands of his children, and dictated not the code of intolerance. The moſt gentle, the moſt compaſſionate, and

* 1 Corinth. chap. 13.

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the moſt juſt of men, did not breathe into the hearts of his diſciples the ſpirit of perſecution, but kindled in it the divine fire of charity.

"To aſſert," ſays that great man* whom I have already quoted, "that "religion has no reſtraining power, "becauſe it does not always re- "ſtrain, is to aſſert, that civil laws "have likewiſe no reſtraining pow- "er. He reaſons falſely againſt "religion, who enumerates at great "length the evils which it has "produced, and overlooks the ad- "vantages. Were I to recount all "the evils which civil laws mo- "narchical and republican go-

* Monteſquieu, book xxiv. chap. 2.

" vernments, have produced in the
" world, I might exhibit a dread-
" ful picture. Although it were of
" no advantage for ſubjects to have
" religion, yet it would be of ad-
" vantage to princes to have reli-
" gion, and to whiten with foam
" the only bridle which can re-
" ſtrain thoſe who fear not human
" laws. A prince, who loves and
" fears religion, is like the lion
" yielding to the hand which
" ſtrokes him, or the voice which
" ſoothes him. He who fears but
" hates religion, is like the ſavage
" beaſt, biting the chain that hin-
" ders him from flying upon the
" paſſenger. He who has no reli-
" gion at all, is that dreadful ani-
" mal, which is totally inſenſible

" of

" of liberty, except when devour-
" ing and tearing in pieces."

I rejoice to ſee this profound and humane writer, this preceptor of kings, trace with his immortal hand, the eulogium of that religion which a good mind will admire; and this admiration will increaſe, in proportion as he has made greater progreſs in philoſophy and metaphyſics, as he has generaliſed his ideas, and taken an extenſive proſpect of things. " Let us ſet
" before our eyes, the continual
" maſſacres of Greek and Roman
" kings and generals on the one
" hand, and on the other the de-
" ſtruction of cities and nations by
" thoſe very kings and generals; a
" Timur a Jengizkan ravaging
" Aſia; and we ſhall ſee, that we

" owe to religion a certain political
" law in government, and in war a
" certain law of nations; advan-
" tages which human nature can-
" not ſufficiently acknowledge."

" In conſequence of this law of
" nations, the victor, in our days,
" allows the conquered to enjoy
" thoſe great privileges, life, li-
" berty, laws, property, and reli-
" gion in particular, if he is not
" blind to his own intereſt*."

How many domeſtic virtues, how many works of mercy ſecretly exerciſed in the heart, has not this doctrine of life produced, and ſtill produces! How many Socrateſes

* Ibid. book xxiv. chap. 3.

and

and Epictetuſes, diſguiſed under the habits of low mechanics! How much better informed are theſe mechanics in their duty, and in the future deſtination of man, than were Socrates and Epictetus!

God forbid that I ſhould be either unjuſt or ungrateful! I ſhall carefully reckon up the advantages of religion, and acknowledge, that true philoſophy itſelf is indebted to it, for its birth, progreſs, and perfection. Dare I affirm, that if the Father *of lights* had not deigned to enlighten mankind, I ſhould not have been an *idolater?* Born, perhaps, in the midſt of thick darkneſs and monſtrous ſuperſtition, I might have been ſwallowed up by prejudice, and perceived nothing

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in nature, and in my own being, except confuſion. And if I had been ſo happy, or ſo unhappy, as to have raiſed a doubt concerning the Author of nature, concerning my preſent and future deſtination, &c. that doubt would have been perpetual, I ſhould never have been able to determine it, and it might have been the torment of my life.

Can *true* philoſophy, then, forget all that it owes to religion? Though it could give a blow to religion, ought it to glory in doing ſo, ſince every blow will infallibly recoil upon itſelf? Should true religion, in its turn, riſe up againſt philoſophy, and forget the important ſervices which it may derive from it?

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SECTION XXII.

THE DOCTRINES OBSCURE, AND APPARENTLY CONTRARY TO REASON.—ANSWERS.

SHALL I attack the religion of JESUS CHRIST, becauſe of its doctrines? Shall I augment its *myſteries*, their *incomprehenſibility*, their contrariety, at leaſt apparent contrariety to reaſon?*

But what right have I to pretend, that every thing in nature and in

* The Doctrines of Chriſtianity are ſome of them above, but none contrary to Reaſon. Vid. Beattie's Evidences of Chriſtianity, ch. iii. ſect. i. ii.

grace

grace ſhould be clear? How many myſteries are there in nature, which I cannot penetrate? Every man, who has made the works of nature his ſtudy, will be ablet o make out an immenſe catalogue of difficulties, which can never be explained by the moſt acute philoſopher. Ought I then to be aſtoniſhed at the obſcurity, which envelopes certain doctrines of religion? Does not this very obſcurity borrow new ſhades from that which covers *certain* myſteries of nature? Would it be philoſophical in me to complain, that God has not given me the eyes and underſtanding of an angel, that I might ſee through all the ſecrets of nature and of grace? Should I deſire, therefore, that in order to ſatisfy my impertinent curioſity, God had reverſed

ed the *univerſal* harmony, and placed me in a higher link of the immenſe chain of beings? Have I not ſufficient light to conduct me ſurely in the path marked out for me; ſufficient *motives* to confirm me in it; hopes ſufficient to animate my endeavours, and to excite me to fulfil my deſtination? How many impenetrable myſteries in *natural religion*, that religion which I believe ſo conformable to my reaſon, and in which it glories; that ſyſtem, which appears to me ſo harmonious, ſo well connected in all its parts, ſo eſſentially philoſophical! How many gulphs contained in the ſingle idea of a *neceſſary, ſelf-exiſtent being*, which an archangel himſelf cannot fathom! And without riſing up to that FIRST BEING, who, like a vor-

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tex, ſwallows up all the conceptions of created *intelligence*, how many unanſwerable queſtions occur to me concerning my own ſoul, whoſe immortality is taught me by natural religion! &c.

But are thoſe doctrines of CHRIST, which appear at firſt ſight ſo *incomprehenſible*, and even *contrary* to my reaſon, really ſo much ſo, as they appear to be? Might not men, perhaps too much prejudiced in favour of their own ideas, or too much prepoſſeſſed with the thought that there is always *merit in believing*, and that this merit increaſes in proportion to the *number* and the *ſpecies* of the articles of *belief*; might not theſe men, I ſay, have blended falſe *interpretations* with the emblematical

matical images and *metaphorical* words of Chriſt, and of his firſt diſciples? Might not they accordingly have altered and multiplied the *doctrines?* Do I not miſtake thoſe *interpretations* for the *doctrines* themſelves? I go to the pureſt ſource of all doctrinal truth: I ſtudy that admirable *book*, which fortifies and increaſes my hopes: I endeavour to interpret it by itſelf, and not by the dreams and viſions of certain commentators: I compare text with text, doctrine with doctrine, each writer with himſelf, and the whole with the moſt evident *principles* of *reaſon;* and after this examination, which requires much reflection, ſerioufneſs, impartiality, long continuance, and frequent repetition, I

ſee

ſee the contrarieties dif
the ſhades decreaſe, light
out of darkneſs, faith unit
reaſon, and both *concur* in f
the ſame *unity*.

CONCLUSION.

FROM the whole, this important concluſion reſults, that there is no ancient hiſtory ſo well atteſted, as that of the MESSENGER OF THE GOSPEL; that there are no hiſtorical facts ſupported by ſo great a number of proofs; by ſuch ſtriking, ſolid, and various proofs, as are thoſe facts on which the religion of JESUS CHRIST is founded.

Sound logic has taught me to diſtinguiſh, with accuracy, the different kinds of certainty, and not to demand rigid *demonſtration* in matters of fact, or in things which eſ-

ſentially

ſentially depend on teſtimony. I know, that what is called *moral certainty*, is not, and cannot be, *perfect* or ſtrict *certainty*; that this kind of certainty is only a greater or leſs *probability*, and which is more or leſs ſucceſsful in gaining the aſſent of the mind, as it approaches more or leſs to that indiviſible point, in which *complete* certainty reſides.

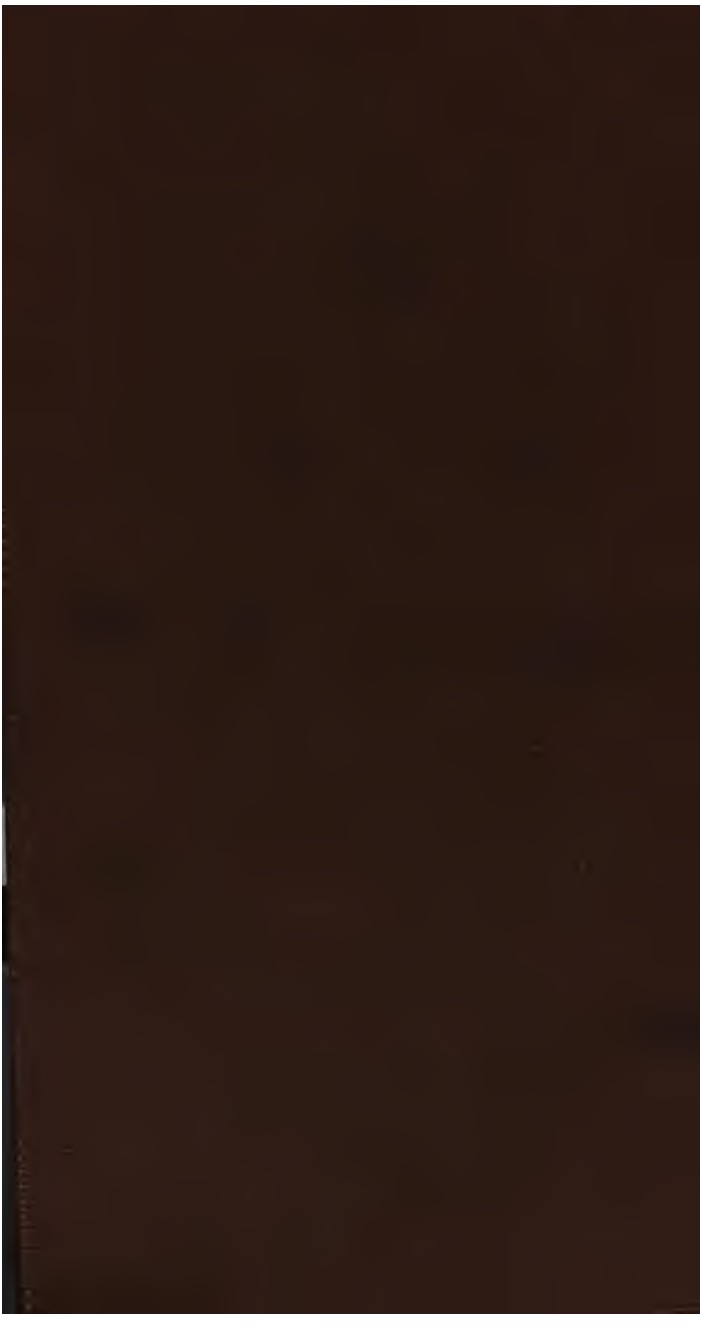
I know, likewiſe, that if I adhere to nothing but to evidence, *properly ſo called*, or to *demonſtration*, and believe nothing but what my own ſenſes atteſted to me, I muſt of neceſſity fall into the moſt abſurd *pyrrhoniſm* *; for what pyrrhoniſm can be more abſurd, than that which ſeriouſly doubts all the facts of hiſtory, phyſics, &c. and which entirely rejects

* Univerſal doubt

jects every kind of teſtimony? What life can be more wretched and limited than that man's, who truſts to nothing but the report of his *own ſenſes*, and who obſtinately refuſes every analogical concluſion?

I ſhall not ſay, that the truth of Chriſtianity is *demonſtrated*; this expreſſion, admitted and repeated with too much ſatisfaction by the beſt *apologiſts*, would certainly be very *improper*. I ſhall only ſay, that the facts, upon which the credibility of the Chriſtian religion is founded, appear to me ſo *probable*, that if I rejected them, I think I ſhould violate the ſureſt rules of logic, and renounce the moſt common *maxims* of *reaſon*.

I have

I have endeavoured to examine my own heart to the bottom; and as I have diſcovered in it no ſecret motive which can induce me to reject a doctrine ſo well calculated to ſupply the weakneſs of my reaſon, to conſole me in my diſtreſſes, to perfect my being, I receive this doctrine, as the greateſt benefit which God can beſtow upon man; and I would likewiſe receive it, though I conſidered it in no other light, but as the beſt ſyſtem of PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY.

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